



Atlantic Council

EURASIA CENTER

THE KREMLIN'S TROJAN HORSES



Name: [REDACTED]
Surname: [REDACTED]
Party: [REDACTED]
Has stepped away from his [REDACTED]
criticized international response to the
conflict in [REDACTED] Russia,
has sided with Putin on [REDACTED]



Name: [REDACTED]
Surname: [REDACTED]
Party: [REDACTED]
Ambassador to Sweden and leader of
[REDACTED] has often to [REDACTED] the
party of its [REDACTED] has made his
party and nationalistic views
[REDACTED]



Name: [REDACTED]
Surname: [REDACTED]
Party: [REDACTED]
Followed in her father's political
footsteps and [REDACTED] leads the
right-wing populist [REDACTED]. Has
previously studied Russian language
and cultures at [REDACTED]



Name: [REDACTED]
Surname: [REDACTED]
Party: [REDACTED]
Has been the leader of the Dutch
nationalist and right-wing populist
[REDACTED] party since [REDACTED].
Expressed his extreme [REDACTED] faced
multiple lawsuits regarding [REDACTED]

Introduction by Alina Polyakova
Flemming Splidsboel Hansen, Robert van der Noordaa,
Øystein Bogen, and Henrik Sundbom



THE KREMLIN'S TROJAN HORSES

Russian Influence in Denmark, The Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden

**Introduction by Alina Polyakova
Flemming Splidsboel Hansen, Robert van der Noordaa,
Øystein Bogen, and Henrik Sundbom**

ISBN: 978-1-61977-567-1.

Cover photo credits, from left to right: FrPMedia/Wikimedia, Per Pettersson/Wikimedia, Steen Brogaard, and Wouter Engler/Wikimedia.

This report is written and published in accordance with the Atlantic Council Policy on Intellectual Independence. The authors are solely responsible for its analysis and recommendations. The Atlantic Council and its donors do not determine, nor do they necessarily endorse or advocate for, any of this report's conclusions.

November 2018

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1** Introduction
- 5** **Denmark:** United in Opposition
- 10** **The Netherlands:** Kremlin Influence in the Wake of National Tragedy
- 17** **Norway:** Exploiting the Balancing Acts
- 23** **Sweden:** Fertile Soil for Influence OPS?
- 30** About the Authors

INTRODUCTION

Alina Polyakova

Two years ago, the Kremlin attacked the United States through a coordinated influence operation targeting the 2016 presidential elections. It also sought to interfere in subsequent elections across Europe. Heightened public attention to Russian influence operations, ongoing governmental and civil society investigations, and increased scrutiny of manipulation by social media companies of their platforms have revealed the inner workings of Russia's political warfare against the West. It is a full spectrum strategy aimed at undermining democratic institutions, sowing distrust, and destabilizing societies by amplifying what divides them. To achieve those goals, the Kremlin has deployed digital disinformation campaigns and cyberattacks. It has carried out intelligence operations on European and American soil. The Russian government and its proxies have sought to gain a foothold in Europe through illicit finance, corruption, and politically motivated energy deals such as Nord Stream 2. It has sought to cultivate and support a network of like-minded political forces that pursues the Kremlin's interests—unwittingly or not—from within democracies.

To date, most attention has been devoted to exposing and analyzing Kremlin-sponsored disinformation campaigns during major elections. Social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter, have become more assertive in taking down Russian-linked accounts and identifying coordinated disinformation attacks. Governments have devoted more resources to understanding the impact of state-sponsored information warfare on national security. Some countries, such as Germany, France, and the United States, have passed, or are considering, various counter-disinformation legislation. Civil society groups have risen to the challenge by educating publics, using open-source data to track disinformation campaigns, and coordinating efforts across the Atlantic. These public and private initiatives have increased public awareness around disinformation and they are a welcome step in the right direction. But transatlantic partners are far

from articulating and operationalizing a coordinated deterrence strategy against the full spectrum of political warfare.

It would be a mistake, however, to focus our efforts solely on countering disinformation around elections. Russia's political warfare against the West doesn't stop at the ballot box or with information manipulation. It is a continuous, multi-vectored, and multi-layered effort that deploys all the tools at the Kremlin's disposal. Taken as whole, these efforts are at the core of a political strategy—honed in Europe's East and deployed against the West. Disinformation, cyberattacks, political influence operations, and illicit financial flows work in mutually reinforcing, if not always well-coordinated, ways in pursuit of the Kremlin's foreign policy agenda. These tools are also tailored to specific national and local contexts, where one tactic may take precedence over another.

To get ahead of Russian political warfare, Western countries must face uncomfortable truths. The first being that Western democracies are not immune to Russian malign influence. As the last two years have shown, the very principles and values that make democracies appealing—openness, transparency, and pluralism—are also what makes such societies vulnerable to manipulation. But our response to those who seek to exploit these principles must remain true to those democratic principles and values. This is a profound challenge for governments.

Second, in every Western country, there are individuals, business interests, civil society organizations, and political parties who pursue and advocate for the Kremlin's agenda. These voices legitimize the Kremlin's divisive strategy toward Western societies. Whether driven by an ideological belief in the Kremlin's model of authoritarianism, economic incentives, or plain ignorance of the threat, these voices act as agents of influence. Most are homegrown-political parties of the far right or far left, factions within centrist parties, current and former officials, and private firms, who find affinity with the Russian view of the world or profit from their relationship with the Kremlin. Regardless of



The Kremlin, seat of the Russian government in Moscow. *Photo credit: Svetlana Tikhonova.*

motivation, by aligning themselves with the Kremlin, these groups and individuals undermine European interests, unity, and long-term security.

This report is the final installment of a three-year long project that sought to expose a less often discussed element of the Kremlin's political warfare: the cultivation of political allies in Europe's core. The aim of the project is to draw attention to Western Europe, where for far too long the Russian threat was either dismissed, ignored, or overlooked. As is now known, the Kremlin's tentacles do not stop in Ukraine, Georgia, or East Central Europe. They reach far and deep in the core of western societies. Acknowledging the ongoing threat is the first step to countering its effects and building long-term resilience.

The first report, *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses* published in 2016, zeroed in on Europe's three major powers: France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Since its publication, revelations of Russian meddling in the Brexit referendum, disinformation attacks around the French presidential elections, and media

support for the Alternative for Germany (AfD) have lent more credence to that study. The assessment of Poland's former foreign minister, Radoslaw Sikorski, in the foreword that "President Putin increasingly sees that which the West seeks—Europe whole, free, and at peace—not as an opportunity for prosperous coexistence but as a threat to his geopolitical agenda and regime survival,"¹ still holds true today.

The 2017 report, *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses 2*, pivoted to examine Russian political influence in Europe's southern flank: Spain, Italy, and Greece. And again, as was the case with the previous report, events over the last year have only confirmed the sober assessment. In Italy, two far-right and pro-Russian parties, the League and the Five Star Movement, now rule in a coalition government. The parties are pursuing a confrontational economic course with the European Union (EU) that could undercut the block's financial stability. Leaders in both parties have suggested that Italy could go against the EU's sanctions policy on Russia, which would deliver a major win for the Kremlin and a blow to transatlantic unity on this issue.

¹ Alina Polyakova, Marlene Laruelle, Stefan Meister, and Neil Barnett, *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses*, Atlantic Council, November 16, 2016. <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/reports/kremlin-trojan-horses>

Map 1. Pro-Russian Political Parties in Western Europe. (A previous version of the map included the Sweden Democrats and the Left Party. These were removed at the author's request.)



It is striking that in all four cases, the pro-Russian far right, driven by domestic dynamics, is gaining traction.

In Greece, Russia has ramped up disinformation and influence efforts to end a decades' long stalemate over the renaming of Macedonia, which, when resolved, would pave the way for Macedonia (as the Republic of North Macedonia) to join NATO and the EU. In a shrewd move in the summer of 2018, Greece accused four Russian diplomats of fomenting unrest, allegedly funding protests against the deal and seeking to bribe opponents. Spain, which the report identified as perhaps most vulnerable to future Russian influence due to widespread misunderstandings of the Russian threat, signed an agreement with Russia to stop the spread of disinformation. A move that will not serve Spanish national interests as the Kremlin turns its attention to Europe's south.

This report, the Kremlin's Trojan Horses 3, looks to Europe's north: Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and the Netherlands. On the whole, public opinion toward Russia in these countries is decisively negative, and the region is likely to remain resilient to the Kremlin's influence operations. Sweden and Denmark seem particularly resistant to Kremlin narratives, and Russian state-funded media outlets have not been able to gain an audience in either country. Still, in

Sweden, pro-Russian forces are on the rise, most notably with the emergence of the Alternative for Sweden party. In the Netherlands, Russia's role in the downing of flight MH17, which killed 193 Dutch citizens, was a decisive, sobering moment. But a Russian-backed campaign to hold a non-binding referendum on Ukraine's Association Agreement with the EU revealed the power of Russian influencers to mobilize support. The vote to reject the deal was a victory for the Kremlin. Norway, with its natural oil wealth, is least economically dependent on Russian energy than perhaps any other European country, but Norwegians are divided in their views toward Russia, with northerners favoring much closer relations. Norway may not be a priority for Russian political warfare yet, but, similarly to Spain, it may provide fertile ground in the future.

It is striking, however, that in all four cases, the pro-Russian far right, driven by domestic dynamics, is gaining traction. This trend puts these countries on par with the rest of Europe, where previously fringe political elements, propelled by brewing anti-immigrant and anti-establishment sentiments, are on the rise. With their overarching pro-Russian foreign policy, these political movements have the potential to drastically shift Europe's stance toward Moscow. If, over the next elections, Europe gains more Italy-style coalitions of pro-Russian far-right parties while centrist forces struggle, Europe may become irreparably divided. This will only serve the Kremlin's interests.

DENMARK

UNITED IN OPPOSITION

Flemming Splidsboel Hansen

On March 26, 2018, the Danish Foreign Ministry notified the Russian embassy in Copenhagen of the expulsion of two Russian diplomats over the “Novichok affair,” the alleged poisoning of former Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia, with the nerve agent Novichok in England three weeks earlier.² This was only the second time Denmark has employed this diplomatic tool against Russia—in 1992, a Russian diplomat suspected of espionage was expelled—but the decision caused little public debate in a country accustomed to having a fraught relationship with its powerful neighbor across the Baltic Sea.

The recent expulsion only served to cement Denmark’s position vis-à-vis Russia as a “frosty pragmatist” that seeks to engage Moscow constructively but remains skeptical about the Kremlin’s intentions and strives to roll back Russian influence in various arenas.³ The relationship has been characterized by conflict since at least 2002, when Russian authorities sought the extradition of Chechen separatist leader Akhmed Zakayev from Denmark. In Copenhagen for the World Chechen Congress, Zakayev was arrested by Danish police at Russia’s request but later released.⁴ He subsequently fled to the United Kingdom. Relations were poor even before this incident, but the Zakayev affair, with its politicized extradition request and Kremlin pressure on Danish authorities, made it clear that the two countries operated by very different standards and prompted strong and widespread criticism of Russia in Denmark.⁵

Most of the Danish public has indeed found reason to hold a negative view of Russia, be it because of human rights violations, privatization of state property, renationalization of private property, interference in the domestic affairs of other former Soviet republics, or growing anti-Western sentiment, including ever-stronger opposition to the European Union (EU) and NATO. There has not necessarily been agreement on *what* to criticize, but there has been a general feeling, irrespective of political preferences, that *something* deserved to be criticized.

POLITICAL CONTEXT

Recent years have seen a change in the discussion in Denmark about Russia, particularly since Russia’s annexation of Crimea and aggression in the Donbas in 2014. On the one hand, politicians are voicing and acting upon general opposition to Russia more strongly than before. On the other hand, an emerging minority maintains the view that suspicion of Moscow has gone too far and that Russia is being vilified, often with ulterior motives (for example, to justify increased Danish defense spending).⁶ As demonstrated below, proponents of this latter opinion have articulated it more openly, even within the Danish Parliament and in major news outlets, and as such it forms part of a difficult public debate with much at stake.

A long-term observer of Danish-Russian relations, I have no knowledge of any Trojan horses, defined by a deceitful nature and subversive policies, serving the Kremlin’s agenda; if they exist, they are not operating at a level high enough to warrant mention here. There

2 “Denmark Expels Two Russian Diplomats,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, March 26, 2018, <http://um.dk/en/news/newsdisplaypage/?newsid=e083fdb3-2422-43e5-97be-02253897f05a>.

3 Mark Leonard and Nicu Popescu, *A Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations*, European Council on Foreign Relations, November 2007, http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR-02_A_POWER_AUDIT_OF_EU-RUSSIA_RELATIONS.pdf. Only the “new cold warriors,” named by Leonard and Popescu as Lithuania and Poland, take a more critical line against Russia than do the “frosty pragmatists,” identified at the time as the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Romania, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

4 “Who Is Akhmed Zakayev?” *BBC Today*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/today/reports/archive/international/zakayev.shtml>.

5 Flemming Splidsboel Hansen, “Danske billeder af Rusland i 2000’erne,” *Nordisk Østforum* 24 (2010), <https://www.idunn.no/nof/2010/02/art17>.

6 “Spar på krudtet,” *Politiken*, November 12, 2017.



DPP foreign policy spokesperson Søren Espersen, seen as something of a Russia hawk within the party.
Photo credit: Janwikifoto/Wikipedia.

is an undergrowth of strongly pro-Kremlin voices on social media—some also offering their services to well-established media, albeit usually in vain—and even quasi-trolling is now prevalent.⁷ Still, both the number of quasi-trolls and their organizational strength appear low when compared with other states in Northern Europe.⁸

Due to the political climate in Denmark, the Kremlin-backed news agency Sputnik discontinued its Danish-language service in March 2016.⁹ Established in April 2015, Sputnik Denmark never really found an audience and struggled to deliver its messages,

both directly to its audience and indirectly through citations by larger media outlets.¹⁰ Similarly, international news channel RT, also operated by the Russian government, suddenly found itself under heavy fire from Danish media in April 2018 when it launched *The Peter Schmeichel Show*,¹¹ featuring the former goalkeeper for Denmark's national soccer team, ahead of the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia. The term “propaganda channel” was widely used as journalists and commentators sought to describe the essence of RT to a somewhat bewildered Danish public.¹² This public was never the primary audience

7 Matias Seidelin, “Når troldene angriber, gør det altid ondt,” *Jyllands-Posten*, January 29, 2017, <https://jyllands-posten.dk/protected/premium/indland/ECE9324827/naar-troldene-angriber-goer-det-altid-ondt>.

8 Martin Kragh and Sebastian Åsberg, “Russia’s Strategy for Influence through Public Diplomacy and Active Measures: The Swedish Case,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* (2017): 29–34, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01402390.2016.1273830>. See also the other case studies in this report.

9 Trude Pettersen, “Sputnik Closes Nordic Language Services,” *The Independent Barents Observer*, March 14, 2016, <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/society/2016/03/sputnik-closes-nordic-language-services>. Sputnik simultaneously discontinued its Finnish-, Norwegian-, and Swedish-language websites, also launched eleven months earlier.

10 Anke Schmidt-Felzmann, “More than ‘Just’ Disinformation. Russia’s Information Operations in the Nordic Region” in *Information Warfare—New Security Challenge for Europe*, ed. Tomáš Čížik (Bratislava: Centre for European and North Atlantic Affairs, 2017), 53.

11 “The Peter Schmeichel Show,” RT, <https://www.rt.com/shows/peter-schmeichel-show-rt-sport/>.

12 Sean Coogan, “Redaktør om Schmeichel-program: Kvalmende propaganda for Rusland,” Radio Denmark, April 5, 2018, <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/udland/redaktoer-om-schmeichel-program-kvalmende-propaganda-rusland>; Adam Holm, “Schmeichel har pantsat sin fornuft for simpel grådighed,” *Berlingske*, April 12, 2018, <https://www.b.dk/kommentarer/schmeichel-har-pantsat-sin-fornuft-for-simpel-graadighed>.

for the show—its target was the much larger English-speaking audience—but the controversy illustrated both how relatively little was known about RT in Denmark and how vehemently the Danish people dismissed the channel as a Kremlin tool.

Opinion polls show that Danes are some of the most critical EU citizens of Russia. When asked about their view of Russia in a 2017 Eurobarometer poll, 83 percent of Danish respondents reported having a “negative” view, with 50 percent holding a “somewhat” negative opinion and 33 percent a “very” negative opinion.¹³ This is in line with the Netherlands (85 percent) and Sweden (81 percent). Only 11 percent of Danes polled said they had a “positive” view of Russia. This environment of skepticism offers relatively infertile ground for pro-Kremlin messaging.

THE LONE RIDER

One of the most prominent voices in the minority-view cohort mentioned above is Marie Krarup, a member of Parliament for the anti-immigrant and Euroskeptic Danish People's Party (DPP). This party holds 37 seats, making it the second-largest bloc in the 179-seat national legislature. It supports the current center-right government, which came into office in June 2015, but has declined invitations to join it. The DPP is part of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group of the European Parliament, along with, among others, the British Conservative Party, Poland's Law and Justice, the Family Party of Germany, and the Finns Party.¹⁴

A military linguist with a specialization in Russian and a former assistant defense attaché at the Danish embassy in Moscow, Krarup has a very relevant background for engaging in the Russia debate. Her party's spokesperson for defense until September 2018, she often comments on broader topics. It is a testament to the highly uniform view of Russia in Danish politics that Krarup's colleagues consider her views an anomaly, generating much media commentary. In one illustrative example, the chief

editor of *Berlingske*, a newspaper Krarup has criticized for its Russia coverage, underlined the contrast between Krarup and most of her parliamentary colleagues, noting her recent assertions (in videos she posted on Facebook) that Russia “is no longer acting expansively,” that many Russians “like an authoritarian regime,” and that many in the West have a “false enemy image of Russia.”¹⁵ (The editorial page of the tabloid *Ekstra Bladet* was more blunt, labeling Krarup “Putin's Marie.”¹⁶)

In response to such criticism, Krarup stated (in a column for *Berlingske*) that “Russia has an autocratic and unpleasant political regime,” but added, “It would be great if *Berlingske* and the other Danish media would try to add more nuance to their coverage of Russia.”¹⁷

Of particular interest here are the questions Krarup has raised about the EU's East StratCom Task Force, established in March 2015 to combat Russian disinformation campaigns. She has questioned East StratCom most prominently before Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, asking Foreign Minister Anders Samuelsen in late 2016 to explain “the purpose of the work of the EU East StratCom Task Force, the interests of Denmark in this [work], and whether the minister finds that this work should be supported by Denmark.” Samuelsen replied that “the Danish government views with great concern the use by the Russian regime of misinformation. . . . [W]ith its resource-rich, state-controlled media, Russia may spread misinformation on a large scale, within as well as outside of Russia.”¹⁸

In the aftermath of the Skripal poisoning, Danish media challenged the DPP over Krarup's relatively Kremlin-friendly views. Søren Espersen, the party's foreign-policy spokesperson, widely viewed as more of a Russia hawk, simply noted, “I set the [DPP] line for Danish foreign and security policy.”¹⁹ This line includes support for Denmark's *Defence Agreement 2018-2023*, designed to counter a “challenging and

13 “Special Eurobarometer 467: Future of Europe,” European Commission, November 2017, http://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/S2179_88_1_467_ENG/resource/47fb5d0e-6a88-4650-b474-1841524f7a3b.

14 “Our Member Parties,” European Conservatives and Reformists Group, <http://ecrgroup.eu/about-us/our-member-parties/>.

15 Tom Jensen, “Putin spiser eftersnakkere som Marie Krarup til morgenmad,” *Berlingske*, March 18, 2018, <https://tomjensen.blogs.berlingske.dk/2018/03/18/putin-spiser-eftersnakkere-som-marie-krarup-til-morgenmad/>.

16 “Putins Marie,” *Ekstra Bladet*, January 25, 2017, <https://ekstrabladet.dk/nyheder/lederen/putins-marie/6504977>.

17 Marie Krarup, “Marie Krarup: Rusland bør dækkes bedre—også i Berlingske,” *Berlingske*, February 23, 2018, <https://www.b.dk/kommentarer/marie-krarup-rusland-boer-daekkes-bedre-ogsaa-i-berlingske>.

18 Foreign Affairs Committee of the Danish Parliament, *Talepunkt: Samråd D: 2016-47136*, November 29, 2016, <http://www.ft.dk/samling/2016/almde/upn/bilag/97/1702546.pdf>.

19 Jakob Hvide Beim and Carl Emil Arnfred, “Putins omstridte Rusland splitter Dansk Folkeparti,” *Politiken*, March 25, 2018, <https://politiken.dk/indland/politik/art6402954/Putins-omstridte-Rusland-splitter-Dansk-Folkeparti>.

An emerging minority maintains the view that suspicion of Moscow has gone too far and that Russia is being villified, often with ulterior motives.

more assertive Russia”;²⁰ support for economic sanctions; and support for the decision to expel Russian diplomats. Notably, it also includes the view that Denmark should allow Nord Stream 2, the Gazprom pipeline project designed to bring natural gas from Russia to Germany, to traverse Danish territorial waters.²¹

JOURNALISM AND ACADEMIA

A 2016 study by the Danish School of Media and Journalism characterized Danish media coverage of Russia as “stereotypical in the sense that it presents Russia and the actions of President Putin against the background of a neo-Soviet viewpoint without attention to the characteristics of the new Russia.”²² The argument that Russia is being misunderstood—with or without intent—has been a recurrent theme on the margins of the public debate in Denmark. It is hard to identify any unity of message among these voices—they occupy narrow ranges of both right- and left-wing thinking—except for their shared message of the “victim Russia.”

Often accompanying this idea is the contention that Russia is “much more than the regime”—that is, focusing on the central power structure is misleading and leaves observers of Russia with a skewed view of developments there.²³ When the centrality of

the Kremlin is recognized, pro-Moscow apologists argue that, as a 2015 *Politiken* column put it, Vladimir Putin is “not as mad as he is made out to be.”²⁴ In this particular column, the straw-man argument is further developed as it is argued that “nearly all conflicts” are initiated by “dehumanizing the irrational opponent in order to make oneself appear to have a higher purpose.”²⁵ One could argue that if Putin is misrepresented in the Danish and even international media, it is not as a madman but rather as a super-rational, chess-playing strategist. In the pro-Moscow apologetic view, various Western actors are demonizing Putin in the service of their interests, be those political, military, or economic in nature.

Think tankers with a background in the Cold War-era peace movement, such as the authors of a recent article for the Copenhagen-based Center for International Conflict Resolution (Rådet for International Konfliktløsning, or RIKO), employ a variation on this theme. They call for a “much better” understanding of the “foreign- and security-policy thinking in Russia,” suggesting that a critical view of Moscow’s actions may be rooted in a lack of knowledge of Russian political culture.²⁶ They go on to argue that “the sanctions war with Russia must cease,” that “recognition of legitimate Russian security demands requires that NATO put an end to all plans about further enlargement on the border of Russia,” and that Russia is “a necessary partner in the fight against Islamist terrorism.”²⁷ This latter point, suggesting that the West may want to reprioritize and, to that end, improve relations with Russia, is also popular on the Danish right.²⁸

THE PROSPECTS

As noted, it is not possible to see Trojan horses operating in Denmark at a high enough level to warrant mention here. The perspective offered here

20 Danish Ministry of Defense, *Defence Agreement 2018-2023*, <http://www.fmn.dk/eng/news/Pages/New-agreement-for-Danish-Defence-2018-2023.aspx>.

21 Espersen expressed this view in an April 9, 2018, interview with Radio24Syv. DPP’s primary argument for the project is that Denmark should support Germany as the latter searches for ways to satisfy its energy needs; a secondary argument is that Russia may be trusted to deliver as agreed.

22 Lars Kabel, *Danske mediers dækning af Rusland*, Danish School of Media and Journalism, December 2016, <https://njc.dk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Danske-mediers-d%C3%A6kning-af-Rusland.pdf>. NB: My own research was criticized in this report, but Kabel later acknowledged to me (in a personal communication dated September 18, 2017) that he had not in fact read any of it.

23 Kabel, *Danske mediers dækning af Rusland*.

24 Lars H. Ehrensvärd Jensen, “Putin er ikke så skør, som man gør ham til,” *Politiken*, April 24, 2015, <https://politiken.dk/debat/kroniken/art5620318/Putin-er-ikke-s%C3%A5-sk%C3%B8r-som-man-g%C3%B8r-ham-til>.

25 Jensen, “Putin er ikke så skør, som man gør ham til.”

26 Jørn Bøye Nielsen et al., “Sådan skaber vi afspænding i Østersøregionen,” RIKO, October 9, 2017, <http://riko.nu/2017/10/09/saadan-skaber-vi-afspaending-i-oestersoerregionen/>.

27 Nielsen et al., “Sådan skaber vi afspænding i Østersøregionen.”

28 Marie Krarup, for instance, has argued in favor of stronger cooperation with Russia to handle “terrorism, Islam, and immigration”: “Fem markante Rusland—udtalelser fra Marie Krarup,” Radio Denmark, February 4, 2017, <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/politik/fem-markante-rusland-udtalelser-fra-marie-krarup>.

is of an open and legitimate debate that has largely developed against a backdrop of otherwise highly united opposition to contemporary Kremlin policies. In general, the contours of public discussion leave little room for Putin apologists.

As seen in many other states, the debate may grow more polarized as Russia and the West's handling of Russia become still more central elements of political and media discourse. The rhetoric among politicians, officials, academics, nongovernmental organization activists, members of the Russian-

speaking community, and other relevant actors has increased in intensity since the events of 2014. In this climate, it is probable that we will see alternative views presented more forcefully and the gradual development of a "rogue element" relying, for instance, on more organized trolling.

Still, given its deeply rooted suspicion of Moscow and its motives, Denmark is apt to remain a "frosty pragmatist" in the years to come. The prevailing view of Russia, the Kremlin, and Putin most likely will prove durable.

THE NETHERLANDS

KREMLIN INFLUENCE IN THE WAKE OF NATIONAL TRAGEDY

Robert van der Noordaa

In 1697, Tsar Peter the Great made a famous trip to the Netherlands, where he studied the art of shipbuilding. While incognito, he lived and worked in Zaandam, a booming industrial town north of Amsterdam that helped make the Netherlands a powerful trading stronghold. After his identity was revealed he left for Amsterdam, where he started working for the colonial trading company VOC, the first listed company in the world. To this day, a statue of Tsar Peter adorns Zaandam's city center.

A little over a century later, Dutch King William II married Grand Duchess Anna Pavlovna of Russia. And recently, Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands opened a branch of the Hermitage Museum in Amsterdam alongside Russia's then-President Dmitry Medvedev, signaling three hundred years of strong cultural and economic ties between the Netherlands and Russia.²⁹

But during the Dutch-Russian Friendship Year of 2013—which was intended as a celebration of the two countries' historically strong ties—a Dutch diplomat in Moscow was savagely beaten by assailants who broke into his apartment and spray-painted homophobic images on his walls.³⁰ There was speculation that the beating was retaliation for an incident in which a Russian diplomat in The Hague was involved.³¹ Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov personally vowed to start a detailed investigation, although it is still unknown if a formal inquiry was ever pursued.

What should have been a year of celebration and friendship between both countries ended up being called “a year of disaster” by Dutch media.³²

The incident sparked a long series of events that would unravel diplomatic relations between the two nations. The most notable of these was the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 near the Ukrainian city of Donetsk in 2014. Of the 298 people who died, 193 were Dutch citizens. Despite overwhelming evidence that Russia had supplied separatist rebels with the weapon that shot down the plane, the Kremlin still denies any involvement.³³

DUTCH POLITICIANS' AFFILIATIONS WITH RUSSIA

The Netherlands, generally recognized as a pragmatic geopolitical player, hardened its position toward Russia after the downing of MH17. Its nuanced and sometimes hesitant views toward sanctions shifted toward a more supportive stance on European Union (EU) sanctions as a result.

But although such a position toward Russia has great support from most Dutch citizens and political parties, there are exceptions. Parties at the political flanks express sympathy for Russia and sometimes even for its leaders, or at least add diverse opinions to the heated debates on the topic. Chief among them is the new conservative right-wing party Forum voor Democratie (Forum for Democracy), the nationalistic right-wing party Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV, or Freedom Party), and the left-wing Socialist Party (SP).

29 “Hermitage Amsterdam Officieel Open - Binnenland - PAROOL,” *Het Parool*, June 19, 2009, <https://www.parool.nl/binnenland/hermitage-amsterdam-officieel-open-a249214/>.

30 Steve Wilson, “Dutch Diplomat Beaten in Savage Attack in Moscow,” *Telegraph*, October 16, 2013, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/10381793/Dutch-diplomat-beaten-in-savage-attack-in-Moscow.html>.

31 Ibid.

32 “Rampjaar Rusland - Nederland: De Incidenten,” *RTL Nieuws*, October 17, 2013. <https://www.rtlnieuws.nl/buitenland/artikel/2320311/rampjaar-rusland-nederland-de-incidenten>.

33 “Nederland stelt Rusland aansprakelijk voor neerhalen MH17: ‘We zullen niet rusten tot de daders zijn gepakt,’” *Volkskrant*, May 25, 2018, <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/nederland-stelt-rusland-aansprakelijk-voor-neerhalen-mh17-we-zullen-niet-rusten-tot-de-daders-zijn-gepakt--bf0fe1a1/>.

Thierry Baudet, leader of the Forum for Democracy, has frequently taken a pro-Russia view and has shared a fair amount of disinformation on social media concerning MH17. On April 28, 2016, he tweeted an article from the dubious media website Time2wakeup.me accompanied by the caption, “BBC documentary: downing of MH17 was the work of the CIA and the Ukrainian intelligence agency.” In fact, the BBC documentary did not draw this conclusion.³⁴

Toward the end of 2016, Baudet and twenty-five others wrote a letter to then-US President Elect Donald Trump concerning MH17. The letter was sent to both the White House and the Trump Tower. The group asked the president-elect to exert pressure to stop the official MH17 investigation and start a new one. According to the group, the current investigation was not independent and not convincing.³⁵ The letter was sent shortly before the Dutch elections; Baudet had recently decided to turn his think tank Forum for Democracy into a political party, and subsequently won two seats in the Dutch parliament in 2017. Baudet later defended signing the letter by stating that he did not sign it as a politician but as a “private person.”³⁶

Then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Bert Koenders was visibly mad when he said of Baudet, “Spreading disinformation, writing such a letter to Trump and attacking the institutions of your own country and not going to the actual debate ... I’ll leave the judgment to others.”³⁷

Baudet’s pro-Russian views frustrate his political contemporaries. Sybrand Buma, the leader of the Dutch Christian Democratic Appeal, took a stance against Baudet’s love for Russia. Baudet constantly flirts with Moscow, Buma pointed out at a political congress in June this year.³⁸ In his speech, Buma noted that there can be no normal relationship with

Moscow as long as the Kremlin does not cooperate with the MH17 investigation. With Baudet’s spreading of suspicion and conspiracy theories, Buma added, he continues to feed public mistrust in Dutch politics and in the country’s institutions.³⁹

Another politician on the right-wing flank is Geert Wilders, leader of the nationalistic PVV, which has a reputation for being pro-Russia or at least mild in its criticism of the country. He is among the few Dutch politicians who shies away from placing any blame for the MH17 crash. When BBC journalist John Sweeney asked him in a February 2017 interview if Russia was behind the downing of MH17, Wilders answered, “We will have to see about that, let’s wait for the prosecutor who is working on it now.”⁴⁰

In February 2018, Wilders was invited by the Russian Duma to visit the Kremlin. The visit, according to Wilders, was part of his fight against “hysterical Russophobia.”⁴¹ The PVV paid for the trip. Wilders claimed that he did not accept loans or gifts from Russia, unlike French far-right politician Marine Le Pen. “I never did and never will,” Wilders stated. “Rubles do not flow through the corridors of the PVV.”⁴²

On his trip, Wilders met with Leonid Slutsky, chairman of the Duma’s Committee on Foreign Affairs, and Anatoly Karpov, the former chess world champion.⁴³ Relatives of the MH17 victims were very upset that Wilders visited Russia, especially when media showed him wearing a friendship pin with flags from both countries.⁴⁴

According to Wilders, the Netherlands would benefit from a friendly relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin and his government. Russia is not the

34 Redactie, “BBC-documentaire: ‘Neerhalen Van MH17 Was Het Werk Van De CIA En Oekraïense Geheime Dienst,’” Time2Wakeup!, April 25, 2016, <http://time2wakeup.me/?p=3725>.

35 Robert van der Noorda, “Baudet vraagt Trump om nieuw onderzoek naar MH17, nabestaanden geschokt,” *Volkskrant*, January 31, 2017 <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/baudet-vraagt-trump-om-nieuw-onderzoek-naar-mh17-nabestaanden-geschokt-b2d43e0b/>.

36 Ibid.

37 Onze Correspondent, “MH17-brief Van Onder Anderen Baudet ‘stuitend,’” *Telegraaf*, September 06, 2017, <https://www.telegraaf.nl/nieuws/334607/mh17-brief-van-onder-andere-baudet-stuitend>.

38 Onze Parlementaire Redactie, “‘Hij Flirt Voortdurend Met Moskou,’” *Telegraaf*, June 02, 2018, <https://www.telegraaf.nl/nieuws/2116037/hij-flirt-voortdurend-met-moskou>.

39 Ibid.

40 BBC Newsnight, “John Sweeney Meets Geert Wilders - BBC Newsnight,” YouTube, February 10, 2017, <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=M6zOXZMvdD8>.

41 Niemantsverdriet, Thijs, “Wilders Wekt Woede Tijdens Bezoek Moskou,” Nrc.nl, February 28, 2018, <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2018/02/28/woede-mh17-nabestaanden-om-wilders-bezoek-moskou-a1594037>.

42 Hubert Smeets, “Wilders Zet Koers Naar Moskou,” *Raam Op Rusland*, November 22, 2017, <https://raamoprusland.nl/dossiers/europa/feiten-en-chronologie/780-wilders-zet-koers-naar-moskou>.

43 Thijs Niemantsverdriet, “Wilders Wekt Woede Tijdens Bezoek Moskou.”

44 Ibid.



Geert Wilders (right), leader of the nationalistic PVV, holds a reputation of pro-Russian sentiment and was one the few Dutch politicians not to assign blame following the MH17 incident. *Photo credit: Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst.*

enemy, according to Wilders, but rather an ally in the battle against terrorism, Islam, and mass immigration from Africa.⁴⁵

DUTCH REFERENDUM ON EU ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT WITH UKRAINE

In April 2016, a non-binding referendum was held in the Netherlands on the EU's Association Agreement with Ukraine. The official organizer of the referendum was a group called GeenPeil, which was set up by GeenStijl, a controversial Dutch blog known for its anti-establishment stance.⁴⁶

What stands out is how the organizers of the referendum—as well as far-left groups like the SP and the Partij voor de Dieren (Animal Party)—drew

upon disinformation from the Kremlin and Kremlin-sympathetic sources. Campaign lines included conspiracy theories that deflected blame from the Kremlin for the downing of Flight MH17 and claims that the Ukrainian government is fascist.⁴⁷

Then-SP member Harry van Bommel (who has since left the party) used what he called “a team of Ukrainians” to spread disinformation within the Netherlands. Several of those people were actually Russians and the Ukrainians in that team were extremely pro-Kremlin. “They attended public meetings, appeared on television, and used social media to denounce Ukraine’s pro-Western government as a bloodthirsty kleptocracy, unworthy of Dutch support,” a February 2017 *New York Times* article pointed out.⁴⁸ Van Bommel himself defended

45 Robbert Van Rijswijk, “Dat Wilders Naar Rusland Gaat Is Niet Meer Dan Logisch,” *HP De Tijd*, November 27, 2017, <https://www.hpdetijd.nl/2017-11-27/dat-wilders-naar-rusland-gaat-is-niet-meer-dan-logisch/>.

46 Robert van der Noordaa, “Kremlin Disinformation and the Dutch Referendum,” *Stopfake*, December 14, 2016 <https://www.stopfake.org/en/kremlin-disinformation-and-the-dutch-referendum>.

47 Jan Germen Janmaat & Tara Kuzios, *Kyiv Post*, April 6, 2016, <https://www.kyivpost.com/article/opinion/op-ed/jan-germen-janmaat-and-taras-kuzio-the-no-camp-in-netherlands-resorts-to-stereotypes-half-truths-and-demeaning-propaganda-411422.html>.

48 Andrew Higgins, “Fake News, Fake Ukrainians: How a Group of Russians Tilted a Dutch Vote,” *New York Times*, February 16, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/16/world/europe/russia-ukraine-fake-news-dutch-vote.html>.

the formation of the group by saying that it was “very handy to show that not all Ukrainians were in favor [of the agreement].”⁴⁹

Some of the pro-Russian individuals were paid by the party itself, van Bommel confirmed at an event in the city of Arnhem, although there is no information on what was paid or to whom. Van Bommel saw no reason to object to the overtly pro-Russian composition of the group, despite insistent complaints from within the Dutch-Ukrainian community.⁵⁰

The participation of one group member, Sergey Markhel, is particularly noteworthy. Markhel has made appearances at protests and rallies across Europe.⁵¹ While no official evidence has emerged linking him to the Kremlin, the significant costs incurred by his activities likely require external financing.

Baudet was another important political voice who aired Russian-minded opinions during the campaign; at that time, he was a leading anti-EU intellectual but not yet a politician. He cooperated with GeenPeil and was one of the main faces behind the campaign against the Association Agreement. He has always been active on social media and regularly retweeted disinformation about Ukraine prior to the referendum.⁵²

Baudet worked with Vladimir Kornilov, who previously served as director of the Center for Eurasian Studies in The Hague.⁵³ Before coming to the Netherlands, Kornilov was director of the Kyiv Center of Eurasian Studies.⁵⁴ Kornilov is Russian but holds a Ukrainian passport; for years he lived in Donetsk.⁵⁵ In a hacked e-mail thread leaked by the Ukrainian Cyber Alliance, conversations between Kornilov and Kirill Frolov, vice director of the Moscow Center for Eurasian Studies, revealed the former's extensive list of high-level contacts within the Kremlin, including nationalist

Russian political philosopher Alexander Dugin and Putin's advisor Sergey Glazyev.⁵⁶ Kornilov actively campaigned against the Association Agreement but denies accusations of Russian espionage.⁵⁷

Ultimately, 61.0 percent of voters were against the Association Agreement with Ukraine, while 38.1 percent voted in favor. The turnout was 32.2 percent. The vote was a setback for Ukraine and a victory for Moscow, whose opposition to the agreement had led to the Maidan Revolution in Ukraine and ultimately to Russia's annexation of Crimea.⁵⁸ In the end, however, the Dutch government ignored the result of the referendum, which was not binding according to the Advisory Referendum Act, and backed the Association Agreement.

DUTCH ECONOMIC TIES WITH RUSSIA

The hardened Dutch geopolitical stance toward Russia has always conflicted with its business interests. The two countries have significant overlap when it comes to business, finance, agricultural products, and, in particular, natural gas sales.

A study conducted by the Dutch magazine *Quote* using Chamber of Commerce records found that that hundreds of Russian companies are registered in the Netherlands.⁵⁹ However, according to the Dutch Embassy in Russia and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, no detailed data is available on the exact number of these companies, whose financial data is only occasionally published on their corporate websites. It is clear, however, that Russian-listed companies make up an important contingent within south Amsterdam's financial district.

49 Andrew Higgins, “Fake News, Fake Ukrainians: How a Group of Russians Tilted a Dutch Vote,” op. cit.

50 Marno De Boer, “Van Bommel: Geen Samenwerking Met Russen,” *Trouw*, February 18, 2017, <https://www.trouw.nl/home/van-bommel-geen-samenwerking-met-russen-a0c8e18d/>.

51 “Kremlin Propagandists Spotted in Anti-Ukrainian Campaign in Netherlands, *UNIAN*, April 4, 2016, <https://www.unian.info/politics/1308917-kremlin-propagandists-spotted-in-anti-ukrainian-campaign-in-netherlands.html>.

52 Robert van der Noordaa, “Kremlin Disinformation and the Dutch Referendum,” *Stopfake*, December 14, 2016, <https://www.stopfake.org/en/kremlin-disinformation-and-the-dutch-referendum>.

53 Huib Modderkolk, “Deze Man Is Volgens De NY Times Een Verlengstuk Van Het Kremlin. ‘Fake News’, Zegt Hij Zelf,” *De Volkskrant*, February 25, 2017, <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/deze-man-is-volgens-de-ny-times-een-verlengstuk-van-het-kremlin-fake-news-zegt-hij-zelf-b930058b/>.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 Robert van der Noordaa, “Kremlin Disinformation and the Dutch Referendum,” *Stopfake*, December 14, 2016, <https://www.stopfake.org/en/kremlin-disinformation-and-the-dutch-referendum>.

59 Henk Willem Smets, “Rusland Wil Af Van Huidig Belastingverdrag Met Nederland,” *Quote*, <http://www.quotenet.nl/Nieuws/Rusland-wil-af-van-huidig-belastingverdrag-met-Nederland-112109>.

THE KREMLIN'S TROJAN HORSES 3.0

Table 1: Total Export of Dutch Goods to the Russian Federation by Year between 2011 and 2017 (billions of euros)

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Jan.-Nov. 2017
Total Dutch export of goods	6.4	7.1	6.8	6.3	4.2	4.3	5.2
Change/year before		+10.4%	-3.4%	-8.1%	-33.3%	+2.8%	+31.8%
Total Dutch import	17.0	20.3	20.6	18.2	13.9	13.6	14.2
Change/year before		+19.9%	+1.4%	-11.8%	-23.3%	-2.1%	+16.0%
Total trade	23.4	27.4	27.4	2.5	17.8	18.2	19.4

Source: Central Bureau for Statistics (CBS).

Table 2: Exports from the Netherlands to Russia in 2017 Compared with 2013 (billions of euros, period Jan. to July)

Goods and services	Jan.-July 2017	Jan.-July 2013
Trucks	219	94
Medicine	140	46
Flowers & plants	128	238
Plastics	89	125
Greenhouses	79	7
Fruits and vegetables	75	110
Agricultural machinery	61	22
Computers/office machinery	52	54
Aromatic oils, perfumes	43	52
Organic chemical products	42	40

Source: Central Bureau for Statistics (CBS).

Dutch exports to Russia fell by 20 percent between 2013 and 2017. In 2013, Russia was still the tenth biggest export country for the Netherlands. Since then, it has fallen to fifteenth place.⁶⁰ In 2013, approximately four thousand Dutch companies exported to Russia, while the figure stood at three thousand in 2016.⁶¹ Much of this decline can be attributed to two Russian boycotts instated in January and August 2014 on Dutch food products. Additionally, the Netherlands' significant flower and fruit industries were severely hurt by EU sanctions, deeply upsetting Dutch farmers.

The reverse relationship is important to Russia as well. In 1997, the Netherlands was the biggest investor in Russia, according to Russian state company Gosinkor, whose objective is to stimulate foreign investment in the country. In total, the Netherlands invested \$9 billion in Russia.⁶²

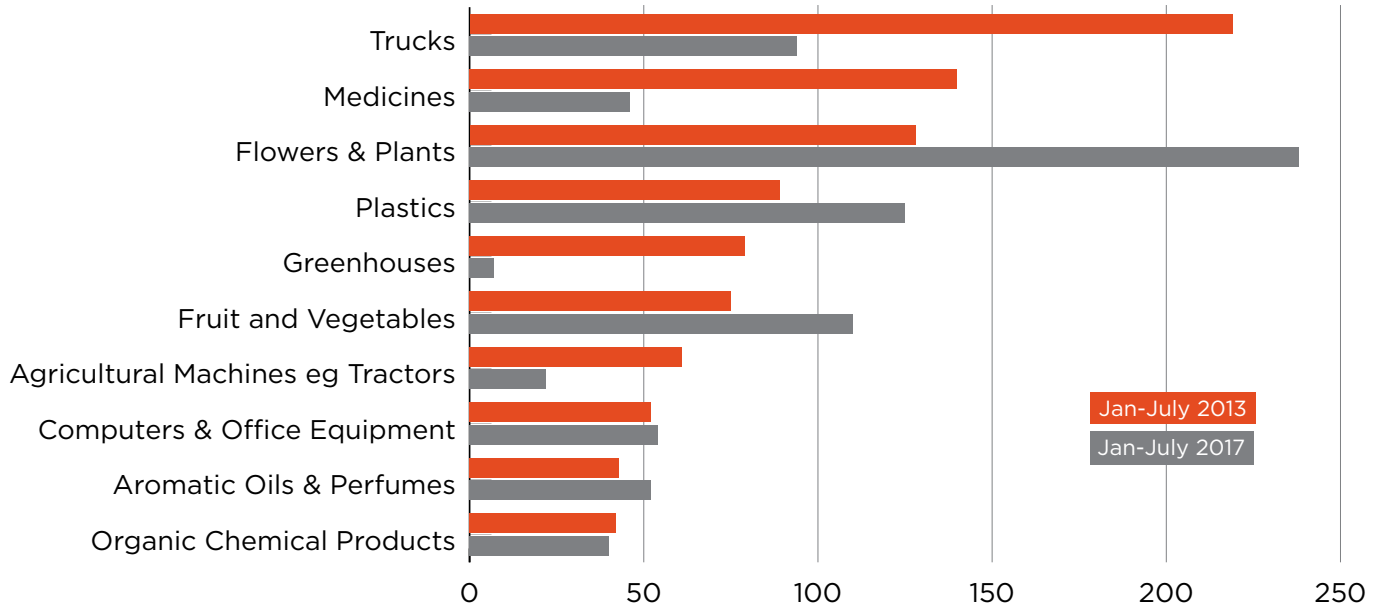
It is noteworthy that a significant amount Dutch trade and industry with Russia consist of oil and gas.⁶³ Currently, the Netherlands has a gas bubble, with twenty-one million cubic meters of gas being

⁶⁰ Centraal Bureau, "Export Naar Rusland Neemt Toe," Centraal Bureau Voor De Statistiek, October 02, 2017, accessed November 09, 2018, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2017/40/export-naar-rusland-neemt-toe>.

⁶¹ Katja Sillen, Oscar Lemmers, and Ralph Wijnen, "Bijna 4 Duizend Bedrijven Exporteren Naar Rusland," CBS, April 2, 2014, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/achtergrond/2014/14/bijna-4-duizend-bedrijven-exporteren-naar-rusland>.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

Figure 1: Total Dutch exports to Russia

Source: Central Bureau for Statistics (CBS).

extracted. But gas extraction will decrease in the coming years and eventually be fully stopped, though there is no detailed plan on when that will occur.

At that point, the Netherlands will become more reliant on imports, and the Dutch state-owned company Gasunie will become an increasingly important European player in securing Russian gas for the Northern European market. Even now, Gasunie requires Russian gas to combine with its own, due to the former's higher calorific value. In total, Gasunie distributes about 25 percent of all European gas. As soon as the Nord Stream II gas pipeline is finished, this role will be even more significant. Gasunie distributes its gas through its pipeline network, which is over fifteen thousand kilometers long and runs throughout the Netherlands, Germany, and Belgium.

While considerable energy concerns and potentially harmful economic implications may eventually inspire Dutch politicians to strike a softer tone with the Kremlin, the MH17 tragedy has cast a dark shadow over Russian-Dutch relations, even those with an economic bent.

RUSSIA'S SPREAD OF DISINFORMATION

Political and economic factors have strongly incentivized Russian interference in Dutch affairs. In November 2017, Dutch Interior Minister Kajsa Ollongren warned against potential Russian meddling, specifically citing the influence of Russian disinformation.⁶⁴ While Ollongren failed to validate her claim with examples, one need not look further than a recent movie in which the Ukrainian Azov Battalion states, "Dear Dutchmen, don't you dare going against Ukraine, it will end bad for you."⁶⁵ The statement was intended to anger Dutch citizens and provoke them to vote against the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU. Research by the investigative website Bellingcat proved that the movie was actually made and disseminated by the Internet Research Agency (IRA), a Russian troll factory based in St. Petersburg.⁶⁶

Recent analysis found that MH17 and the PVV were popular topics in the IRA's Twitter campaign. On July 18, 2014, the day after MH17 was shot down, the trolls put out 57,500 tweets, a record number sent

64 "Ollongren: Russische Desinformatie Bij Oekraïne-referendum," NOS, November 15, 2017, <https://nos.nl/artikel/2202937-ollongren-russische-desinformatie-bij-oekraïne-referendum.html>.

65 "Dreigfilmpje 'Nee Tegen Oekraïne' Komt Uit Rusland," NOS, April 03, 2016, <https://nos.nl/artikel/2096898-dreigfilmpje-nee-tegen-oekraïne-komt-uit-rusland.html>.

66 Bellingcat Investigation Team, "Behind the Dutch Terror Threat Video: The St. Petersburg 'Troll Factory' Connection," Bellingcat, April 03, 2016, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2016/04/03/azov-video/>.

by the IRA on one day.⁶⁷ A significant number of the tweets about MH17 were in Russian and therefore mainly directed at the Russian population. Research done by Dutch newspapers *NRC* and *De Groene Amsterdammer* also showed that the IRA sent hundreds of tweets in Dutch with anti-Islam hashtags and subjects.⁶⁸

In 2015, Russia attempted to hack the Dutch Safety Council, just two weeks before an important technical report was to be published.⁶⁹ The effort was ultimately unsuccessful. More evidence of MH17-related hacks was discovered after four Russian officers were arrested in April of this year, according to Dutch military intelligence agency MIVD. The Russians had attempted to hack the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The arrested officers also tried to gain insight into the MH17 investigation; one of their laptops contained evidence that it had been used to attack the Malaysian prosecutor and Malaysian police.

A POLITICAL RESPONSE

While Dutch positions in international politics tend to favor dialogue and compromise, the shooting down of MH17 and Russia's subsequent actions have led to the Dutch government taking a stronger stance against Russia.

Since 2018, the Netherlands has occupied a seat on the United Nations (UN) Security Council; winning a seat had been a diplomatic objective for years, but was seen as more of an imperative after the downing of MH17. Membership on the council has guaranteed the Dutch international attention and support in the aftermath of the catastrophe.

In May of this year, during a UN Security Council meeting, Dutch Foreign Minister Stef Blok attacked Russia directly. "When it comes to establishing truth and accountability for what happened to flight MH17, no state has the right to remain silent. Quite the contrary: all states have a duty to cooperate constructively, to shed light on the truth and not to obscure it with continuous mist," Blok said, referring to Russia.

Blok looked deliberately at Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia while speaking these words. Nebenzia looked away. "After four years of devastation, Ukraine deserves peace," Blok concluded. "So too, do the victims of flight MH17 deserve justice."

The downing of flight MH17 has had far-reaching effects for Dutch-Russian economic and political interactions. Currently, the relationship is at an all-time low, and it will likely remain difficult and complicated for years to come.

67 Reinier Kist and Rik Wassens, "Russische Trollen Nooit Zo Actief Als Dag Na Neerhalen MH17," *NRC*, October 17, 2018, <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2018/10/17/russische-trollen-nooit-zo-actief-als-dag-na-neerhalen-mh17-a2624920>.

68 Robert Van Der Noordaa and Coen Van De Ven, "Van Vaccineren Tot MH17: Russische Trollen Beïnvloeden Ons Online," *De Groene Amsterdammer*, August 29, 2018, <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/hoerussische-trollen-inspelen-op-westerse-angsten>.

69 "'Russen Probeerden Onderzoeksraad MH17 Te Hacken'," *AD.nl*, January 14, 2017, accessed November 09, 2018, <https://www.ad.nl/binnenland/russen-probeerden-onderzoeksraad-mh17-te-hacken-a8ae031e/>.

NORWAY

EXPLOITING THE BALANCING ACTS

Øystein Bogen

On the face of it, Norway seems less vulnerable to Russian influence operations than most European countries, even though it is one of a few NATO countries with a land border with Russia. It has a strong, petroleum-based economy and is not reliant on Russian imports or exports. There is a low degree of political division and no major ethnic or social tensions. The population is generally well-educated, and the Norwegian press is diverse and free.

Norway's small clique of *Russlandversteher*s is marginal. Among the main political parties, overt sympathy for Kremlin policies remains rare.

Nevertheless, a review by this author found that since 2014 there have been at least three significant Russian influence operations aimed at disrupting Norwegian politics and public life. In 2015, Russian propaganda agency Sputnik published a falsified document in an attempt to discredit the Norwegian Nobel Committee, which awards the Nobel Peace Prize.

Later the same year, Norway and Finland experienced an unprecedented flow of migrants who crossed their borders with Russia on bicycles. The Russian border is normally under extremely strict control by the Federal Security Service. In this case, multiple witnesses saw Russian border guards helping the refugees leave the country. Both Finnish and Norwegian officials today suspect that the Kremlin facilitated the so called Arctic refugee crisis for political reasons.⁷⁰

There have also been coordinated attempts to sow doubt about Norway's sovereignty over the strategic Arctic archipelago of Svalbard, and continuous public diplomacy aimed at discrediting government institutions and the Norwegian press.

In addition, Kremlin-controlled media are pushing a steady stream of narratives about Norwegian affairs that could widen old political fault lines and open new areas for polarization, such as immigration.

Some of these moves have resonated with mainstream as well as fringe political players. As elsewhere, these Kremlin sympathizers are found at the far right and far left of the political spectrum, and they have become increasingly vocal.

HISTORICAL, POLITICAL, AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Support for Norway's NATO affiliation remains strong; in an August 2016 poll, 76 percent of respondents agreed that membership is "important to the country's security."⁷¹ Despite Norway's historical tendency towards neutrality vis-à-vis the great powers, today most Norwegians regard Russia with skepticism, if not outright apprehension.⁷² In a 2017 poll, 58 percent of respondents considered President Vladimir Putin "a threat to world peace."⁷³

Norway's policy on Russia, and on security issues in general, has been characterized by a broad consensus among the main political parties. Since Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, the conservative governing coalition, with support from most opposition parties, has staunchly supported NATO and European Union (EU) positions on deterrence and sanctions. Defense

70 Øystein Bogen, *Russlands hemmelige krig mot Vesten* (Oslo: Kagge Forlag, 2018).

71 *Meningsmålinger om Forsvaret og internasjonalt samarbeid*, Folk og Forsvar, August 2016, http://www.folkogforsvar.no/resources/meningsmalinger/Meningsmalinger-om-Forsvaret-og-internasjonalt-samarbeid_-august-2016.pdf.

72 Stian Bones, *I oppdemningspolitikken grenseland: Nord-Norge i den kalde krigen 1947-1970*, University of Tromsø, February 2007, <https://munin.uit.no/bitstream/handle/10037/2916/thesis.pdf>.

73 Jesper Nordahl Finsveen, "Nordmenn: Putins Russland er en trussel for verdensfreden," *Dagbladet*, July 18, 2017, <https://www.dagbladet.no/nyheter/nordmenn-putins-russland-er-en-trussel-for-verdensfreden/68499388>.

spending has risen substantially, and Norway has contributed military forces to enhance regional security in the Baltics.

At the same time, successive Norwegian governments have been keen to avoid disputes with the Kremlin, largely eschewing inflammatory rhetoric and making sure NATO activity is minimal in areas bordering Russia. To this day, Oslo's policy towards Moscow is a balancing act between deterrence and reassurance: While supporting the overall policy of Norway's allies, political leaders emphasize the need to maintain dialogue and good relations with Moscow on matters where there is common ground.

This dual track has become fodder for much political debate. It has also been exploited by the Kremlin, which treats Norway's difficulty in forging a coherent foreign policy as a matter for criticism and occasional ridicule, summed up in a February 2017 statement by the Russian embassy in Oslo: "The selective approach [to cooperation] proposed by Norway . . . is not acceptable."⁷⁴

This supposed wobbling has been a key theme of the Kremlin's attempts to influence Norwegian politics, not least because Norway is regionally divided over how to deal with a more assertive Russia. Due to historical reasons, mostly because the Red Army liberated them from Nazi Germany in World War II, people in the three northernmost counties have a far more positive view of Russia than does the rest of Norway. Northern political and grassroots groups have lobbied the government to improve relations with Moscow. A 2017 survey of northern Norwegians found that 76 percent favored stronger ties with Russia.⁷⁵

The Kremlin has also weighed in on Norway's relationship with its military allies, chiefly the United States. In October 2016, Oslo gave the green

light for a small contingent of US Marines to be stationed in Norway for the purpose of cold-weather training.⁷⁶ The measure was sharply criticized by Russian authorities as a "deviation" from traditional Norwegian foreign policy. Hardline Russian Senator Franz Klintsevich, then-deputy chairman of the Federation Council's Defense Committee, went so far as to threaten that Norway risked becoming "a target for strategic weapons."⁷⁷ Such rhetoric played well on the Norwegian far left, which, in line with a key Kremlin propaganda narrative, has portrayed the Marines' presence as a diktat from Washington that will harm national security.⁷⁸

In a similar vein, Russia protested loudly when NATO's Parliamentary Assembly met in May 2017 on Svalbard, the Arctic island chain that, under a unique post-World War I treaty, is formally Norwegian territory but also a demilitarized zone in which signatory nations are free to pursue commercial interests.⁷⁹ Russia has maintained a coal-mining community on Svalbard since Soviet times. In a military sense, the archipelago, together with the Norwegian mainland, forms a bottleneck for Russia's Northern Fleet's access to the Atlantic and has been a flashpoint for diplomatic jostling between Moscow and Oslo for decades.⁸⁰

A notable provocation came in April 2015 when Dmitry Rogozin, a top Kremlin official subject to EU and Norwegian sanctions over Russia's actions in Ukraine, defied the travel ban by stopping in Svalbard on his way to a Russian base at the North Pole.⁸¹ (Due to the archipelago's complicated legal status, there is no immigration control for arriving travelers.)

While Norwegian lawmakers scrambled to fill the legal void that allowed Rogozin's touchdown, Kremlin-controlled media questioned Norway's sovereignty over Svalbard, and the hashtag "SpitsbergenIsOurs"

74 "Kommentar av Russlands Ambassade i Norge i forbindelse med situasjonen i det bilaterale forholdet," Embassy of Russia in Norway, February 17, 2017, http://www.norway.mid.ru/press_17_011.html.

75 Ole Magnus Rapp, "Folk i nord vil ha tøvær," *Klassekampen*, February 21, 2017, <http://www.klassekampen.no/article/20170221/ARTICLE/170229994>.

76 "Norway Confirms US Plans to Deploy 330 Marines," Agence France-Presse via The Local, October 25, 2016, <https://www.thelocal.no/20161025/norway-confirms-us-plans-to-deploy-330-marines>.

77 Øystein Bogen, "Norge kan bli mål for våre strategiske våpen. Befolkningen vil lide," TV 2, October 30, 2016, <https://www.tv2.no/a/8691052/>.

78 Åse Marit Befring, Sofie Dege Dimmen, and Lars Håkon Pedersen, "Regjeringen dobler antall amerikanske soldater i Norge," NRK, June 12, 2018, <https://www.nrk.no/norge/regjeringen-dobler-antall-amerikanske-soldater-i-norge-1.14080738>.

79 Thomas Nilsen, "Moscow Says NATO Meeting on Svalbard Is a Provocation," *The Barents Observer*, April 21, 2017, <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic-security/2017/04/moscow-says-nato-meeting-svalbard-provocation>.

80 Morgane Fert-Malka and Troy Bouffard, "The Unique Legal Status of an Arctic Archipelago," World Policy Institute, December 6, 2017, <https://worldpolicy.org/2017/12/06/the-unique-legal-status-of-an-arctic-archipelago/>.

81 Kjetil Hanssen and Hege Wallenius, "Sanksjonsrammet russer på Svalbard-besøk," *Aftenposten*, April 18, 2015, <https://www.aftenposten.no/verden/i/nj1n/Sanksjonsrammet-russer-pa-Svalbard-besok>.



NATO forces taking part in Operation Cold Response, annual winter warfare exercises in central Norway.
Photo credit: Master Sgt. Chad McMeen.

appeared on social media, echoing nationalistic cries during the annexation of Crimea.⁸² Moscow created a “stop list” of Norwegians barred from entering Russia (among them the journalist who broke the Rogozin story).⁸³ In retrospect, the whole affair smacks of a coordinated campaign combining public diplomacy, social media, and boots on the ground to undermine Norwegian perceptions of Svalbard’s status.

THE MAJOR PLAYERS: NORWEGIAN INFLUENCERS

Those seeking to nudge Norwegians in a more Kremlin-friendly direction can be divided into two groups: Norwegian influencers and Russian influencers. Among the former are Norwegian politicians from mainstream parties who support various aspects of

Kremlin policy; local and regional interest groups; and some elements of Norwegian mass media and the blogosphere.

None of the nine parties currently represented in Norway’s parliament, the Storting, can be characterized as pro-Russian per se. Key figures in three parliamentary parties—two on the left, one on the right—have made statements sympathetic to the Kremlin, but there have been no indications that the parties have received direct Russian support or shifted Norwegian policies regarding Russia.

In September 2014, the Socialist Left Party adopted a resolution asserting that NATO was partly to blame for Russian aggression in Ukraine and elsewhere. The statement called on Norway to withdraw its forces from NATO-led training exercises in the Baltics and negotiate with Moscow to settle differences.⁸⁴ The

82 Spitsbergen is the largest island in Svalbard and home to the predominantly Russian mining outpost of Barentsburg. The hashtag appeared in both Russian (#Шпицбергеннаш) and Norwegian (#SvalbardRussisk) versions.

83 Atle Staalesen, “Expelled Barents Observer Editor Is on Sanction List,” *The Barents Observer*, March 11, 2017, <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/civil-society-and-media/2017/03/expelled-barents-observer-editor-was-sanction-list>.

84 “Nei til militær opptrapping i Øst Europa,” National Board of the Socialist Left Party, September 6, 2014, <https://www.sv.no/wp-content/>

Those seeking to nudge Norwegians in a more Kremlin-friendly direction can be divided into two groups: Norwegian influencers and Russian influencers.

party has also led criticism of Norway's growing military cooperation with the United States, including its hosting of Marines. Echoing Moscow's line, the party contends the arrangement threatens Norwegian security, endangers relations with Russia, and breaches Norway's traditional ban on allowing foreign bases on its soil.

The more radical Red Party, the successor to the now-dissolved Workers' Communist Party, has largely abstained from official pro-Russia pronouncements but ardently opposes Norway's US and NATO ties. Several prominent Red Party members have openly advanced Kremlin narratives, in particular the notion that Ukraine is ruled by fascists. A 2015 opinion article for the newspaper *Dagbladet* co-authored by the party's foreign policy spokesperson blamed NATO for Russia's violations of international law in Ukraine, saying sanctions and isolation are "increasing Russia's determination to defend its sphere of influence against what it perceives as a hostile world."⁸⁵

These two leftist parties hold twelve seats in the 169-member Storting and their influence on national security policy is accordingly limited. The same cannot be said of the right-wing Progress Party, which has twenty-seven seats and a share in governance as part of Prime Minister Erna Solberg's center-right coalition.

Officially, the Progress Party's stance on Russia aligns with government policy, but some of its lawmakers hold strong pro-Russian views. Christian Tybring-Gjedde, the party's influential foreign policy spokesman, has repeatedly endorsed the Kremlin position on Ukraine and Crimea and called for an end to sanctions.⁸⁶

Another Progress legislator, Tor André Johnsen, has drawn attention for having Russia ties. He was the only member of Norway's delegation to the 2014 Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe to support a Russian resolution on combating terrorism that was widely viewed by Western representatives as a diversionary tactic following Russia's aggression in Crimea and the Donbas.⁸⁷ It was later reported that the Norwegian Police Security Service (PST) twice cautioned Johnsen over frequent social contacts with known Russian intelligence officers serving in Oslo under diplomatic cover.⁸⁸ The PST said it has issued similar warnings to several other parliamentarians but did not identify them or their party affiliations.

Pro-Russian elements in Norway are predominantly found at the fringes of public and political life and do not appear to be part of any organized movement. They make themselves heard on social media and myriad alternative news sites and blogs that promote Kremlin policies and pro-Russia narratives. Some are politically on the left, some on the right. Two of the most popular sites, *The Herland Report* and *Steigan.no*, are run by Norwegians (the latter was created by Pål Steigan, former head of the Workers' Communist Party) but publish some articles in English and claim to have several hundred thousand readers.

Some mainstream media, notably the leftist newspaper *Klassekampen*, have published material promoting pro-Kremlin ideas, particularly in relation to NATO and Ukraine. Some of these articles have been proven to be untrue or to contain grave inaccuracies. *Klassekampen* nevertheless enjoys considerable government subsidies and steadily

uploads/2014/01/Nei-til-militær-opptopping-i-Øst.pdf.

85 Stian Bragtvedt and Aslak Storaker, "Situasjonen i Ukraina kan føre til en storkrig," *Dagbladet*, February 20, 2015, <https://www.dagbladet.no/kultur/situasjonen-i-ukraina-kan-fore-til-en-storkrig/60188863>.

86 Kristian Skard, "Man kan ikke på enkelt og bastant vis hevde at Russland bryter folkeretten," *Dagens Næringsliv*, February 17, 2017, <https://www.dn.no/nyheter/2017/02/17/1624/Politikk/-man-kan-ikke-pa-enkelt-og-bastant-vis-hevde-at-russland-bryter-folkeretten>.

87 Lars Joakim Skarvøy and Eirik Mosveen, "PST advarte Frp'er på Stortinget: For nær omgang med Russlands ambassade," *Verdens Gang*, June 23, 2015, <https://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/i/a6bj7/pst-advarte-frp-er-paa-stortinget-for-naer-omgang-med-russlands-ambassade>.

88 Skarvøy and Mosveen, "PST advarte Frp'er på Stortinget."

rising circulation.⁸⁹ With nearly twenty-four thousand subscribers in 2017, it ranks among the country's ten most-read newspapers.⁹⁰

RUSSIAN INFLUENCERS

The most prominent Russian influencer in Norway is Moscow's diplomatic mission in Oslo. Under Ambassador Teimuraz Ramishvili, the embassy has been increasingly active in seeking to sway both the native Norwegian population and the Russian immigrant community.⁹¹

The embassy has publicly endorsed and promoted Norwegian grassroots organizations that hew to a strong pro-Russia line. One such group, People's Diplomacy—Norway, has made several high-profile trips to occupied Crimea and served as a self-appointed observer during Russia's March 2018 presidential election.

Through its social media accounts and public statements, the Russian embassy has frequently sought to discredit various Norwegian institutions, particularly the mainstream media, while cheerleading for Kremlin-friendly blogs and alternative media. On at least four occasions in 2017 and 2018, the embassy explicitly condemned media outlets and even individual journalists for publishing allegedly false and "Russophobic" material.

In a scathing Facebook post earlier this year, the embassy cited a letter it supposedly received from "Ola Nordmann" (the Norwegian equivalent of John Q. Public) complaining of "false news" about Russia. The post encouraged Norwegians to abandon the traditional press in favor of outlets like The Herland Report and Steigan.no, whose "growth in popularity shows that there is a demand for alternative points of view, that society is tired of the black-and-white image that 'established' media force upon their audiences."⁹²

Russian diplomats have also sought to discredit the PST. The security service, which usually shuns the limelight, went public in early 2017 with information

that Russian operatives had run an influence operation against the Norwegian Nobel Committee, which awards the Nobel Peace Prize.⁹³ The PST also revealed that Russian state hackers had tried to infiltrate the computer systems of Norway's Labour Party and other public institutions ahead of the 2017 elections. The embassy accused the security service of contravening the will of the Norwegian people and spreading anti-Russian lies in hopes of beefing up its funding.

Another important agent of influence is the Kremlin-controlled news agency Sputnik. Since 2016 it has published some four hundred articles a year about Norway on its main English-language site. (Sputnik launched a Norwegian-language service in 2015 but it lasted less than a year.) This content rarely reflects the broader Norwegian news agenda, focusing instead on specific topics and themes that push narratives popular on the ideological fringes. Quite a few Norwegians appear to get their news from Sputnik, judging from its comments section and social media accounts.

Much Russian disinformation has been aimed at the Norwegian Child Welfare Services, highlighting supposed mistreatment of Russian and other Eastern European migrant children.⁹⁴ (As documented by the EU's East StratCom Task Force, Finland and Sweden have been similarly targeted.) Coverage of this subject has tailed off somewhat in the past two years, but a general trend of attempting to portray Norway as a nation in moral decay persists.

A recent review by this author of Sputnik articles over an eight-month period from late 2017 to mid-2018 found that 29 percent of stories on Norway focused on the country's general lack of morality, often coupled with allegations of double standards on issues such as human rights and environmental protection.⁹⁵ These narratives jibe with some far-left positions but might also be aimed at the Russian diaspora in Norway.

89 "Circulation Figures Norwegian Newspapers," Medianorway, accessed August 25, 2018, <http://medienorge.uib.no/english/?cat=statistikk&medium=avis&queryID=190>.

90 "Circulation Figures Norwegian Newspapers," Medianorway.

91 According to the 2018 census, Norway's resident population includes about 17,500 Russian immigrants and 3,500 children born to Russian immigrant parents. "Immigrants and Norwegian-Born to Immigrant Parents," Statistics Norway, March 5, 2018, <https://www.ssb.no/en/befolkning/statistikker/innvbe/f/aar>.

92 Russian Embassy in Norway, "Russland i norske media," Facebook, February 21, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/notes/russian-embassy-in-norway/russland-i-norske-media/1578728845581803/>.

93 Tormod Strand, "PST bekrefter russisk informasjonsoperasjon mot Norge for første gang," NRK, January 27, 2017, <https://www.nrk.no/norge/xl/pst-bekrefter-russisk-informasjonsoperasjon-mot-norge-for-forste-gang-1.13339968>.

94 "Norway—A Nation in Moral Decay?," EU vs. Disinfo, February 24, 2017, <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/norway-a-nation-in-moral-decay/>.

95 A similar analysis done by the author in 2016 showed similar trends in Sputnik content. Bogen, *Russlands hemmelige*, 174.

Another prominent propaganda thread portrays Norway as manipulated to serve US interests, supposedly at odds with the people's wishes—also a theme that resonates with the far left. Nineteen percent of the stories were related to supposed tensions caused by Muslim immigration, a topic with strong appeal on the far right.

Eleven percent of the 161 articles reviewed could be characterized as grossly inaccurate or straight-out false. Sputnik stories are nevertheless frequently and uncritically republished by sympathetic Norwegian outlets and contribute to an overall Kremlin effort to widen existing fault lines in society.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

At present, Norway does not seem to be a priority for Kremlin influence efforts. Very few examples of active support or cultivation of Norwegian politicians or commentators have come to light. But the country could be fertile ground for future attempts, with supporters on both the far right and far left standing ready to assist. According to the PST's most recent annual threat assessment, efforts to influence politicians, journalists, and public servants and sow division and discontent are likely to continue at a steady pace.⁹⁶

Arguably, Norway's transparent political system and generally well-functioning society make it highly resilient to such operations. Nevertheless, the country remains vulnerable, for three primary reasons:

1. Trying to maintain the traditional balance between deterrence and assurance, Norwegian policy makers have had difficulty defining how to handle Russia in a rapidly changing security environment.
2. There is no systematic government effort to reveal, analyze, and dispute disinformation that finds its way to Norwegian audiences, and little appetite among political leaders to name and shame when Russian influence operations are uncovered.
3. There is little national research on the topic and a low degree of awareness among both decision makers and the general public.

Other factors might give Kremlin sympathizers greater traction and heighten their (thus far) limited impact—notably, disputes between Europe and the US administration on issues such as trade and defense spending. An opinion poll published in July 2018 found Norwegians to be effectively split over whether they trusted the United States to fulfill its NATO obligations in a conflict between Norway and Russia.⁹⁷

If these doubts about transatlantic cooperation persist, they might push the Norwegian public towards a posture of neutrality, as witnessed during the Cold War, and raise the likelihood that Norway will be a target of future Russian influence operations.

⁹⁶ *Threat Assessment 2018*, Norwegian Police Security Service, 2018, <https://www.pst.no/globalassets/artikler/trusselvurderinger/annual-threat-assessment-2018.pdf>.

⁹⁷ Kirsten Karlsen and Jesper Nordahl Finsveen, "Tviler på Trump-hjelp til Norge," *Dagbladet*, July 5, 2018, <https://www.dagbladet.no/nyheter/tviler-pa-trump-hjelp-til-norge/69983339>.

SWEDEN

FERTILE SOIL FOR INFLUENCE OPS?

Henrik Sundbom

Sweden faces a time of political turmoil. In recent years, the migration crisis in Europe has come to dominate Swedish politics, with the debate growing more polarized and an increasing number of voters turning to anti-establishment parties.

The national election in September 2018 was a tight race between the former government coalition—the Social Democrats and the Greens, with support from the Left Party—and the center-right Alliance for Sweden, consisting of the Conservative Party, the Liberals, the Centre Party, and the Christian Democrats, which formed governments from 2006 to 2014. The far-right Sweden Democrats (SD) grew substantially, riding a wave of discontent with the country's generous immigration policy and inability to handle migration-related problems, and the party is now firmly established as Sweden's third largest. Neither the current nor former governing bloc managed to secure a majority in the Riksdag, Sweden's parliament. Social Democrat Stefan Löfven is currently leading a transitional government.

For decades, relations between Sweden and Russia were shaped by Sweden's doctrine of nonalignment in peacetime and neutrality in wartime. When Sweden joined the European Union (EU), that doctrine changed. The Cold War was over, and Sweden's orientation was clearly European. The Lisbon Treaty states that if an EU state is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other member states are obliged to assist it by all means in their power. Sweden's commitment to this obligation was confirmed in a declaration of solidarity by the Riksdag that took effect in 2009. In 2016, Sweden signed a host-nation agreement with NATO and subsequently facilitated the joint Sweden-NATO Aurora 17 exercise on the island of Gotland and throughout Sweden the following year.

Geographical proximity to Russia means that Swedish politicians follow Moscow's doings closely, and Sweden has actively reached out to former Soviet republics, supporting the newly independent

Baltic states in the early 1990s, initiating, in tandem with Poland, the EU's Eastern Partnership in 2008, and harshly criticizing Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Sweden's leadership in pushing European values in former Soviet republics, combined with the end of its neutrality, has placed the country in a values-based conflict of interest with Russia. Swedish liberalism and a perceived rising problem with criminality have become frequent topics in Russian state propaganda.

Around the Baltic Sea, military tensions between Russia and Sweden have increased. Consideration of Russia's possible responses to geopolitical decisions has become a dividing line in Swedish politics.

MAJOR PLAYERS

Unlike in many other European countries, no openly pro-Kremlin parties sit in the Riksdag. However, several parties hold agendas that overlap with that of the Kremlin, making them vulnerable to influence operations and potential agents of influence themselves.

On the right flank of this equation is the populist Sweden Democrats. With roots in 1980s neo-Nazi movements, it is foremost an anti-immigration party, campaigning against Muslim influence and for Sweden to promote "traditional values" and follow the United Kingdom's footsteps out of the EU. This agenda corresponds well with the Kremlin's strategic goals in Europe, and Moscow probably identifies the party as its strongest potential ally in Swedish politics, shown indirectly through frequent invitations to participate in propaganda channels such as RT and on election observation trips.

Officially, Sweden Democrats judge Russia harshly and Sweden's relationship with NATO divides the party. However, outright sympathy for Russian President Vladimir Putin's nationalism and social conservatism can be found in its lower ranks. This

does not make the party a Trojan horse per se but does make it a prime *target* for Russian influence operations. Smaller political movements further to the right are more outspoken in their support of Russia.

On the left, nostalgia for neutrality combined with large doses of anti-Americanism and Euroskepticism have prompted politicians to embrace and spread Russian narratives, propose policies in line with Moscow's foreign policy, and resort to "whataboutism." The Left Party and elements of the Green Party engage in such activities, often in cooperation with the peace movement and smaller parties outside of the Riksdag, like the Feminist Party and the openly pro-Kremlin Communist Party.

No Russian media publish in Swedish (the Kremlin-controlled news agency Sputnik launched a Swedish website in 2015 but shut it down the following year⁹⁸), and the reach of Russian media in the country is limited. However, a plethora of digital media platforms, related to the political groups mentioned above, share Russian narratives, most notably on the extreme right. These online magazines have a symbiotic relationship with Russian state media; they quote propaganda outlets such as Sputnik and RT and are in turn frequently quoted as sources or consulted as experts.

The Kremlin is outspoken in its ambition to influence Russians abroad. About thirty thousand people in Sweden have immigrated from Russia or have at least one Russian-born parent. A small subset of this community loudly supports the Kremlin, not least online, and its major organizations cooperate with official bodies like the Putin-created, Kremlin-sponsored Russkiy Mir Foundation. The acts of a small but vocal minority are, however, do not imply that all native Russians are pro-Kremlin native Russians as pro-Kremlin.

BUILDING NETWORKS OF INFLUENCE

When two Sweden Democrat members were elected to the European Parliament in 2014, they joined the Euroskeptic political group Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy and the affiliated Alliance for Direct Democracy in Europe (ADDE), both led by the UK Independence Party (UKIP). Other noteworthy members of Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy are Italy's Five Star Movement and Alternative for Germany, both notoriously pro-Kremlin.

Swedish journalist Patrik Oksanen created the "Russia Index,"⁹⁹ a resource that ranks Euroskeptic party members' voting patterns in relation to Moscow's matters of interest. These range from implementing EU Association Agreements with Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova to supporting Russian human rights group Memorial. By early 2015, Sweden Democrats stood with UKIP and France's National Front among the most Kremlin-friendly parties in the European Parliament.

In November 2016, Sweden Democrats and ADDE arranged an international gala in Stockholm, billed as an alternative to the Nobel Prize ceremony, which excluded Sweden Democrat representatives. Amid pomp and circumstance, former Czech President Vaclav Klaus—once named by *The Economist* as "one of [Putin's] warmest admirers abroad"¹⁰⁰—was presented the first and to date only European Freedom Award. Among the guests were then-UKIP leader Nigel Farage and Rolandas Paksas, a former president of Lithuania who was impeached in 2004 over suspected ties to Russian organized crime.¹⁰¹

Representatives of Sweden Democrats—including the party's former international secretary Kent Ekeröth, who has recruited several pro-Kremlin employees to the party's offices in Stockholm and Brussels¹⁰²—are frequently invited to comment on RT. Russian GONGOS (government organized nongovernmental organizations) have invited party members serving in both the Riksdag and European Parliament to serve as Russian election observers, and there are several examples of suspected Russian infiltration of the

98 "Report: Russia Spread Fake News and Disinformation in Sweden," Radio Sweden, January 9, 2017, <https://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=2054&artikel=6604516>.

99 "Russia-Index: 11 New EU-Sceptic Parties Added," *EUBloggen*, January 10, 2015, <https://eublogg.wordpress.com/2015/01/10/russia-index-11-new-eu-sceptic-parties-added/>.

100 "Pretty Pictures," *the Economist*, March 2, 2006, <https://www.economist.com/node/5578805>.

101 "Who's Invited to Swedish Nationalists' Far-Right Gala?" *The Local*, November 4, 2016, <https://www.thelocal.se/20161104/heres-who-swedens-nationalists-have-invited-to-their-far-right-gala>.

102 Patrik Oksanen, "Putilovaffären: Historien om Kent Ekeröths anställningar och Sverigedemokraternas europeiska nätverk," *Gefle Dagblad*, September 23, 2016, <http://www.gd.se/opinion/ledare/putilovaffaren-historien-om-kent-ekeroths-anstallningar-och-sverigedemokraternas-europeiska-natverk>.

party.¹⁰³ When Sweden Democrats' candidate list for the 2018 election was released, Kent Ekeröth's name was missing, causing outrage among some party members.

In recent years, Sweden Democrats' board adopted a zero-tolerance policy on racism and excluded the party's most radical elements, with an eye to increasing its mainstream appeal and electoral potential. Several high-ranking party members have been excluded or fired, not only because of outright racism and sympathies with movements further to the right, but also because of favorable views on the Kremlin.¹⁰⁴ Moscow-born Member of Parliament (MP) Pavel Gamov was excluded after he joined an "election monitoring" trip to Moscow in September 2017, arranged by a GONGO led by Leonid Slutsky, a high-ranking member of the Russian State Duma.

In 2015, Sweden Democrats dismissed Gustav Kasselstrand, the chairman of the party's youth branch, Sweden Democratic Youth (SDU), due to his connection with "identitarians," a white-nationalist movement that draws inspiration from the Russian ideologue Alexander Dugin. The party subsequently cut all ties with its radical youth organization.

In March 2018, Kasselstrand and his former deputy in SDU, William Hahne, launched the party Alternative for Sweden (AfS). AfS was branded as a more radical alternative to SD, not only on immigration but also geopolitics. Three MPs from Sweden Democrats and a fourth MP who had been excluded from SD because of her anti-Semitic statements joined AfS in its first months. Among these four was the former party leader of SD Mikael Jansson, until then a member of the Defense Committee and defense spokesperson of the SD.

Kasselstrand formerly worked for the agricultural firm Agrokultura, which is controlled by Russia's biggest owner of farmland, Prodimex. He has also held contacts with Carl Meurling, managing director of RISE Capital, an infrastructure company that has

On the left, nostalgia for neutrality combined with large doses of anti-Americanism and Euroskepticism have prompted politicians to embrace and spread Russian narratives. . .

done large-scale projects in Russia, partnered with major Russian banks, and reportedly cultivated ties with Putin.¹⁰⁵ The chairman of RISE Capital donated 400,000 euros (\$463,000) to Britain's Conservative Party in April 2016, two months before the Brexit vote,¹⁰⁶ and Meurling once offered Sweden Democrats a contribution of SEK 3 million (\$337,000). That donation was never carried out.¹⁰⁷

Alternative for Sweden has developed into the country's most pro-Kremlin political group. As head of SDU, Kasselstrand opposed all sanctions against Russia, for example, in a seminar in Visby in July 2015. In 2013, he tweeted that he would rather welcome Vladimir Putin to Stockholm than former US President Barack Obama.¹⁰⁸ In March 2018, the party reached out to US President Donald Trump supporters in the United States with video ad asking for crowdfunding, which was quickly reposted by Sputnik.¹⁰⁹

In June 2018, Kasselstrand, Jansson, and a third representative of Alternative for Sweden attended the International Forum on the Development of Parliamentarism, in Moscow, hosted by Leonid Slutsky and featuring Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov as keynote speaker. Apart from seeking relations with the Kremlin, Kasselstrand declared on the party's Facebook page that Alternative for Sweden was attempting to network with other nationalist

103 Damien Sharkov, "Russian-Born Swedish Official Prompts 'Security Risk' Worries," *Newsweek*, September 26, 2016, <http://www.newsweek.com/russian-born-swedish-official-prompts-security-risk-worries-business-immigrant-502951>.

104 "Sverigedemokraterna stänger av sekreterare," *Expressen*, September 28, 2016, <https://www.expressen.se/nyheter/sverigedemokraterna-stanger-av-sekreterare/>.

105 "Svensk affärsman med SD-kopplingar fick miljardkontrakt i Ryssland," *Aftonbladet*, September 28, 2016, <https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/article23609387.ab>.

106 Holly Watt, "May Must Explain Tory Donor's Links to Russia, Says Labour MP," the *Guardian*, August 27, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/aug/27/may-must-explain-tory-donors-links-to-russia-says-labour-mp>.

107 "Svensk affärsman med SD-kopplingar fick miljardkontrakt i Ryssland," *Aftonbladet*.

108 "Nya diskussioner om SD:s Putin-relation efter DN:s avslöjande," *Eubloggen*, February 16, 2015, <https://eublogg.wordpress.com/2015/02/16/nya-diskussioner-om-sds-putin-relation-efter-dns-avslojande/>.

109 "Press Release: Alternative for Sweden Launches International Crowdfunding Campaign," Alternative for Sweden, March 20, 2018, <https://alternativforsverige.se/press-release-alternative-for-sweden-launches-international-crowdfunding-campaign/>.

parties—the National Front, Vlaams Belang, and the Freedom Party of Austria—as well as parties such as Lega from Italy and Alternative for Germany. During the conference, Jansson aimed a “special thanks to President Putin for Russia’s contribution in destroying the Islamic State.”¹¹⁰

At the end of August, Jansson travelled to Damascus to discuss repatriation of Syrian immigrants with the Bashar al-Assad regime, accompanied by the two editors of the far-right magazine *Nya Tider*, one of Sweden’s most frequent publishers of Russian geopolitical narratives. Among others, Jansson met the country’s top Muslim leaders with ties to President Assad and the speaker of the Syrian parliament.¹¹¹

On September 7, two days before election day, AfS was joined by international guest speakers at a square meeting in downtown Stockholm.¹¹² From Belgium and Vlaams Belang came Frank Creyelman. In an interview with Sputnik News following the Yalta International Economic Forum earlier in 2018, Creyelman exaggerated his own merits as a Trojan horse by stating that he “was the guy, who brought all the right-wing parties to make a turn towards Russia.”¹¹³ It is, however, clear that he plays an active role in Kremlin’s public relations machinery by acting as an election observer for Russian GONGOs and as a frequent guest on Russian propaganda channels.¹¹⁴ From the Italian far-right party Lega came Alessandro Sansoni, a frequent contributor to *Geopolitica.ru* and *Katehon*, two Russian far-right platforms affiliated with the ideologue Alexander Dugin and the oligarch Konstantin Malofeev.

Alternative for Sweden managed to make a huge footprint in social media during the 2018 election campaign. In the last weeks before the election, AfS was second only to SD in creating Facebook engagement. On election day, however, it became clear that social media support had little correlation with actual popular support. AfS received just

over twenty thousand votes, or 0.3 percent of the electorate. In a recent report, the Swedish Defence Research Agency mapped the presence on Twitter of automated accounts, so-called bots, in connection with the 2018 Swedish election. The study showed an increase of automatized activities, but it also showed that most of the bots expressed traditionalist, authoritarian, or nationalist views. Forty-seven percent of the analyzed bots supported Sweden Democrats, 29 percent Alternative for Sweden.¹¹⁵

Groups centered around Arktos Media, a publishing house run by former Swedish neo-Nazi and leading global alt-right figure Daniel Friberg, occupy a similar ideological space as AfS. Arktos has the international rights to several of Alexander Dugin’s books, and the Russian political scientist has spoken at Identitarian Ideas, an annual conference in Stockholm that gathers followers of various far-right movements. Mark Sleboda, a political analyst at RT and Sputnik, has also spoken at the event. Launched in Sweden but now based in Budapest, Arktos has drawn international attention for its ambitions to unite radical nationalists around the world.

Even further to the right, the neo-Nazi Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) has little popular support but nevertheless manages to stage large, attention-getting marches and demonstrations. In 2017, one of its representatives managed to win a municipal office in Borlänge.

In early 2017, three members of NRM were implicated in recent bombings of a syndicalist café and a refugee center in Gothenburg. During the investigation, it emerged that two of the suspects had received paramilitary training in Russia, taking part in the ultranationalist Russian Imperial Movement’s “Partisan” course.¹¹⁶ In 2015, leaders of the Russian Imperial Movement visited Sweden, held meetings with NRM, and reportedly donated SEK 30,000

110 “Mikael Jansson at International Forum on Development of Parliamentarism in Moscow 2018,” YouTube, published June 5, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPPCeDNkS1A>.

111 “Avhoppade SD-ledamoten Mikael Jansson träffade syriska diktatorns närmaste män,” *Dagens Nyheter*, August 31, 2018, <https://www.dn.se/nyheter/politik/avhoppade-sd-ledamoten-mikael-jansson-i-traffade-syriska-diktatorns-narmaste-man/>.

112 “Lega Nord och Alternative für Deutschland talar på Alternativ för Sveriges valfinal i Kungsträdgården,” *Alternative for Sweden*, September 7, 2018, <https://alternativforsverige.se/lega-nord-och-alternative-f%C3%BCr-deutschland-talar-p%C3%A5-alternativ-f%C3%B6r-sveriges-valfinal-i-kungstr%C3%A4dg%C3%A5den/>.

113 “‘Chem Attack’ Designed to Damage Russia—Belgian Honorary MP,” *Sputnik News*, April 20, 2018, <https://sputniknews.com/analysis/201804201063761464-creyelman-novichok-russia-chemical-attack/>.

114 Anton Shekhovtsov, *Tango Noir: Russia and the Western Far Right* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

115 “The Swedish Election and Bots on Twitter,” FOI, September 12, 2018, <https://www.foi.se/en/pressroom/news/news-archive/2018-09-12-the-swedish-election-and-bots-on-twitter.html>.

116 J. Lester Feder, Jane Lytvynenko, and Edgar Mannheimer, “These Swedish Nazis Trained in Russia before Bombing a Center for Asylum Seekers,” *BuzzFeed News*, July 22, 2017, https://www.buzzfeed.com/lesterfeder/these-swedish-nazis-trained-in-russia?utm_term=.ye176aRmY0#.hleMyYKZnl.

(\$3,400) to the Swedish outfit.¹¹⁷ NRM runs a page on the Russian social media platform VKontakte that is entirely in Russian.¹¹⁸

On the other side of the ideological spectrum is the Left Party, formerly the Swedish Communist Party. It was a founding member of the Comintern and was closely affiliated with the Soviet Union until the 1960s. When the Cold War ended, the Left Party moved in a democratic direction and erased communism from its identity. Today, the Left Party has no relationship with the Kremlin but at the local level, the Left Party sometimes arranges public events together with the very small and openly pro-Kremlin Communist Party of Sweden.¹¹⁹

Former Left Party MP Stig Henriksson has defended his participation in a March 2015 public meeting arranged by Agneta Norberg of the Swedish Peace Council and featuring Vladimir Kozin, head of the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISS), a GONGO that experts describe as the public-relations arm of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service.¹²⁰ Henriksson took part in several events organized by Norberg, who invited Kozin to Sweden at least three times and also spoke alongside Johan Bäckman, RISS's representative in Northern Europe. In October 2018, Bäckman was sentenced to a one year suspended sentence for harassing a journalist critical of Russia.¹²¹

The Green Party is a junior partner to the Social Democrats.¹²² The party's former foreign policy spokesperson Valter Mutt has welcomed some of Sweden's most infamous pro-Russian propagandists to his office in the parliament. In 2015, the Green Party fired Mutt's foreign policy adviser due to his frequent contact with the Russian embassy, from which he was also accused of accepting gifts. The

adviser subsequently joined a public relations firm in Scandinavia that represents the natural gas pipeline project Nord Stream 2 and allegedly lobbied former Green Party colleagues on the island of Gotland to support Gazprom's lease of the harbor of Slite.¹²³ The adviser, who has not been identified by name in the Swedish media, has strongly denied all accusations.

Support for the Kremlin is stronger in the independent green movement, which overlaps more with the Swedish peace movement than with the Green Party itself. Tord Björk, a prominent blogger and activist with ties to the party, spoke at a Moscow conference in 2012 arranged by the Russian GONGO World Without Nazism, one of the most influential entities pushing the narrative, popular in Russian media, of escalating support for Nazism in Ukraine in the first half of the 2010s.¹²⁴ Björk engages both on- and offline with pro-Kremlin groups such as Anti-Euromaidan Sweden, and he has published articles sympathetic to Russia's annexation of Crimea, some of them in *Miljömagasinet*, a magazine with close ties to the Greens.

ALTERNATIVE MEDIA UNIVERSE

Self-described "alternative" media are increasingly popular in Sweden, mainly among supporters of Sweden Democrats, who generally distrust traditional news outlets. They stretch across a broad ideological spectrum on the far right, from the nationalism of Sweden Democrats to outright Nazism. It is unclear how they are funded, but the Stockholm daily *Dagens Nyheter* traced ads on six of the most influential such platforms to Russian businessmen with backgrounds in cybercrime.¹²⁵

A few of these magazines have less opaque connections with Russia. Chang Frick, the editor of online newspaper *Nyheter Idag* (*News Today*),

117 "Ryska fascister: Starkast band har vi med svenska nazister," *Aftonbladet*, September 29, 2017, <https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/k2xOj/ryska-fascister-starkast-band-har-vi-med-svenska-nazister>.

118 Nordfront.se, https://vk.com/nordfront_sverige.

119 Micky Nyberg, "Samarbete med kommunisterna möts av hård kritik," *SVT News*, February 27, 2018, <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/norrboten/bodenvantern-samarbetar-med-kommunisterna>.

120 Patrik Oksanen, "Stig Henrikssons (V) märkliga omsorg om rysk underrättelsetjänst," *Helahälsingland*, March 2, 2017, <http://www.helahalsingland.se/opinion/ledare/stig-henrikssons-v-markliga-omsorg-om-rysk-underrattelsetjanst>.

121 SPT/Mikael Sjövall, "Ilja Janitskin och Johan Bäckman döms till fängelse för rasistiska texter i webbtidningen MV-lehti och Uber Uutiset," HBL, last updated October 18, 2018, <https://www.hbl.fi/artikel/ilja-janitskin-och-johan-backman-doms-till-fangelse-for-rasistiska-texter-i-webbtidningen-mv-lehti-o/>.

122 "Val till riksdagen—Röster," Swedish Election Authority, accessed May 31, 2018, <https://data.val.se/val/val2014/slutresultat/R/rike/>.

123 Olof Svensson, "Mp-mannens mejl om Ryssland: 'Skulle uppskattas på central nivå,'" *Aftonbladet*, March 1, 2017, <https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/samhalle/a/LzoEQ/mp-mannens-mejl-om-ryssland-skulle-uppskattas-pa-central-niva>.

124 "International Conference. Nevermore: The Memory of the Holocaust and the Prevention of Crimes against Humanity. A World without Intolerance, Racism, Extremism, Negativism and Anti-Semitism," World Without Nazism, accessed June 19, 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20131209125725/http://worldwithoutnazism.org/conferences/moscow-jan-2012/>.

125 "Extremsajtarnas pengar kopplas till ryska och ukrainska affärsmän," *Dagens Nyheter*, March 17, 2017, <https://www.dn.se/ekonomi/extremsajtarnas-pengar-kopplas-till-ryska-och-ukrainska-affarsman/>.



The neo-Nazi Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) has little popular support but nevertheless manages to stage large, attention-grabbing marches and demonstrations.
Photo credit: Frankie Fouganthin/Wikimedia.

previously worked for RT. Closely affiliated at its inception with Sweden Democrats, *Nyheter Idag* has become more independent in the past few years.

Samhällsnytt (*Society News*) employs a Russian-born activist who writes under the pseudonym Egor Putilov; he previously worked for Sweden Democrats and has operated under several names. In 2014, Egor Putilov purchased a house from a Russian businessman with a criminal past and political connections in Saint Petersburg. Two months later, he sold it for twice the price, earning SEK 6 million (\$675,000).¹²⁶

The web domains for both *Nyheter Idag* and *Samhällsnytt* were originally registered by Kent Ekeröth, the aforementioned former Sweden Democrat MP.

Nya Tider (*New Times*) is run by Vávra Suk, former party secretary of the National Democrats, a radical offshoot of Sweden Democrats whose leader, Marc Abramsson, has featured as a recurring guest on

RT. The magazine—the only one in its genre that is distributed in print—publishes pieces by Alexander Dugin, and the German far-right journalist Manuel Ochsenreiter is a member of the editorial staff. *Nya Tider*'s two Swedish editors have taken part in “election observation” in Moscow on invitation from a Russian GONGO. They also participated in a pro-Kremlin conference in Moldova attended by Dugin; Igor Dodon, Moldova's Kremlin-friendly president; and Levan Vasadze, one of Georgia's most prominent pro-Russia propagandists, and have travelled with AfS leaders to Moscow and Syria. Suk has written two articles for Dugin's think tank, Katehon.

Fria Tider (*Free Times*) enjoys a symbiotic relationship with Sputnik, frequently sourcing material from and providing material to the Russian propaganda outlet. *Fria Tider* is the first choice when Alternative for Sweden wants to reach its core sympathizers.

¹²⁶ “SD-tjänstemannen gjorde miljonvinst med rysk affärsman—‘potentiell säkerhetsrisk,’ enligt experter,” Radio Sweden, September 23, 2016, <https://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=83&artikel=6522899>.

The Swedish far right has also spawned a handful of YouTubers who have managed to attract substantial international audiences, including Angry Foreigner, Red Ice (aka Henrik Palmgren, now based in the United States), and The Golden One (Marcus Follin). All of these have published videos that are sympathetic to the Kremlin.

Online publications operate along similar lines to those that are found on the left and among conspiracy theorists. The most noteworthy are the left-wing blog *Jinge.se* and the online magazine *Newsvoice*, two of Sweden's most frequent purveyors of Russian narratives. Both build bridges between the far right and the far left. Anders Romelsjö, editor of *Jinge.se*, is deputy chairman of a small and little-known organization called Swedish Doctors for Human Rights, members of which frequently appear in Russian state media as ostensible experts on chemical warfare, declaring Russia free from guilt and defaming the White Helmets in Syria.¹²⁷

CONSEQUENCES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

Sweden's recent elections ushered in a period of uncertainty, with talks to form a new government still on going. Russian propaganda spotlights Swedish social issues: migration-related crime, poor integration, and Swedish Islamic fundamentalists fighting in Syria. These are not imaginary problems, although Russian outlets exaggerate them, and it is of utmost importance that Swedish politicians find credible solutions to regain people's trust. Russia's attempts to influence Swedish politics did not stop in September, and an inability to deal with actual problems creates fertile soil for influence operations.

Geopolitically, Sweden is firmly oriented toward cooperation with its Nordic neighbors, the EU, the United States, and NATO. The Social Democrats want Sweden to be as close to the transatlantic alliance as possible without being a member, and the center-right opposition favors outright membership. If Sweden Democrats gain more political influence, they

are certain to push for a more distanced relationship with NATO and the EU. This aligns with the will of the Kremlin, which prefers to negotiate with individual states rather than the EU and favors a neutral Sweden.

Popular support for NATO membership has climbed, from 37 percent in 2014 to 44 percent in 2017, according to polling by the Stockholm Free World Forum.¹²⁸ However, the alternative media universe is likely to continue spreading anti-Western propaganda to audiences on both the left and right. If the popularity of such platforms continues to rise, it might generate an increase in anti-Western sentiment, undermining public support for Sweden's close relationship with NATO and commitment to the EU. Only 3 percent of the Swedish population considers Donald Trump a positive force for global peace and security,¹²⁹ which could have a marginal effect on domestic support for strong transatlantic ties.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Many countries, including Sweden, need more transparency regarding the funding for political activities and organizations. Current law makes it difficult to discover if a political actor receives money from foreign interests.

The single most important action needed, however, is further research into the Kremlin's strategy to influence Western democracies. Knowledge hubs need support regionally, nationally, and internationally. The EU's East StratCom Task Force¹³⁰ is a good example, as are NATO's Centres of Excellence.¹³¹

The media sector must find sustainable solutions to finance high-quality journalism. As public trust in traditional media falls, more people turn to dubious sources online. The answer is not to regulate social media or nongovernmental organizations, but to challenge fake news and extreme narratives and to command attention with quality journalism on topics people care about.

127 "Gasattacker förnekas med hjälp från svensk läkargrupp," *Dagens Nyheter*, April 21, 2017, <https://www.dn.se/nyheter/sverige/gasattacker-fornekas-med-hjalp-fran-svensk-lakargrupp/>.

128 "Briefing: Inställningen till Nato," Stockholm Free World Forum, November 2017, <https://frivarld.se/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Opinion-Nato.pdf>.

129 "Svenskarna fortsatt skeptiska till Trump—men SD-väljare avviker," *Dagens Nyheter*, February 3, 2018, <https://www.dn.se/nyheter/politik/svenskarna-fortsatt-skeptiska-till-trump-men-sd-valjare-avviker/>.

130 "Questions and Answers about the East StratCom Task Force," European Union External Action, November 8, 2017, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/2116/questions-and-answers-about-east-stratcom-task-force_en.

131 "Centres of Excellence," NATO Allied Command Transformation, accessed May 31, 2018, <http://www.act.nato.int/centres-of-excellence>.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



DR. ALINA POLYAKOVA

David M. Rubenstein Fellow – Foreign Policy, Center on the United States and Europe, Brookings Institution

Alina Polyakova is the David M. Rubenstein Fellow in the Foreign Policy program's Center on the United States and Europe at the Brookings Institution and adjunct professor of European studies at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) at Johns Hopkins University. She specializes in Russian foreign policy, European populism, and U.S.-Russia-Europe relations. Polyakova's recent book, "The Dark Side of European Integration" (ibidem-Verlag and Columbia University Press, 2015) examines the rise of far-right political parties in Western and Eastern Europe. Polyakova is a frequent contributor to the Washington Post, The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy and commentator in major media outlets including Fox News, BBC, and Bloomberg.

Previously, she served as director of research and senior fellow for Europe and Eurasia at the Atlantic Council, professor of sociology at the University of Bern, and Fulbright Fellow. She serves on the board of the Free Russian Foundation and is a term member of the Council on Foreign Relations. She has also held numerous fellowships from the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, the National Science Foundation, and the Swiss National Science Foundation.

Polyakova holds a doctorate from the University of California, Berkeley, and a bachelor's in economics and sociology with highest honors from Emory University. She speaks Russian and German.



FLEMMING SPLIDSBOEL-HANSEN

Senior Researcher, Danish Institute for International Studies

Flemming Splidsboel-Hansen is Senior Researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS). Mr. Splidsboel-Hansen is currently the Coordinator of the institute's research unit on international security and has focused on Russian domestic and foreign policy, Russian national identity, Ukraine, the EU Eastern Partnership, the Commonwealth of Independent States, NATO, and the OSCE.

Mr. Splidsboel-Hansen has authored DIIS policy briefs on the use of disinformation techniques by the Kremlin, including *Russian Influence Operations: Trying to Get What You Want* (2018) and *The Weaponization of Information: News from the Cognitive Domain* (2017). Mr. Splidsboel-Hansen is a Doctor of Philosophy in International Relations from the University of Copenhagen.



ROBERT VAN DER NOORDAA

Investigative Journalist

Robert van der Noordaa is a Dutch investigative journalist and analyst specialising in Ukraine and Russia. Mr. van der Noordaa has followed and reported on current affairs in Ukraine and Russia since 2004, subsequently conducting extensive work interviewing Russian dissidents and studying hybrid warfare and propaganda since 2014.

For the past three years he has worked on analyzing trolls and troll armies on Twitter and Facebook. His articles were published by Volkskrant, Groene Amsterdammer and Stopfake/Integrity Initiative. For broadcaster Humanistische Omroep (abbr. HUMAN) he worked on an episode of tv-series Denktank (Eng. Thinktank) on Russian trolls and political influence using social media. For broadcaster VPRO he did research for a documentary on Russian influence in Sweden called “Schimmenspel - Poetins onzichtbare oorlog” (Shadowplay - Putin’s invisible war).



ØYSTEIN BOGEN

Senior Foreign Affairs Correspondent, TV2

Øystein Bogen is the Senior Foreign Affairs Correspondent responsible for coverage of Russia and the Commonwealth for Independent States for TV2, Norway’s independent national broadcasting company. During his twenty-three-year career with TV2, Mr. Bogen has also served as a foreign affairs reporter, documentary film producer, and as Head of Foreign News.

Mr. Bogen has produced sixteen documentaries to date, including the award-winning *The Battle for Attica Squara* (2010), *A Prayer for Beslan* (2005), and *Kursk: Tragedy in the Barents Sea* (2000). He also recently published two Norwegian-language novels, *Russlands hemmelige krig mot Vesten* (2018) and *Putin og jeg. Russlands vei fra håp til håpløshet* (2016). Mr. Bogen possesses a master’s degree in political science from the University of Bergen and a bachelor’s degree in journalism and media science from the University of Bergen and the University of Georgia.



HENRIK SUNDBOM

Fellow, Stockholm Free World Forum

Henrik Sundbom is a fellow at the think tank Stockholm Free World Forum and an independent researcher/consultant specialized in influence operations and digital media. He has contributed with investigative research on the international ties of extremist groups for several major Swedish media outlets and think tanks and is frequently engaged as an expert on authoritarian influence operations. He has previously worked with democracy support in Eastern Europe, as editor in chief for the Free World Magazine and as associate fellow at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs.

Atlantic Council Board of Directors

INTERIM CHAIRMAN

*James L. Jones, Jr.

CHAIRMAN EMERITUS

Brent Scowcroft

PRESIDENT AND CEO

*Frederick Kempe

EXECUTIVE VICE CHAIRS

*Adrienne Arsht

*Stephen J. Hadley

VICE CHAIRS

*Robert J. Abernethy

*Richard W. Edelman

*C. Boyden Gray

*Alexander V. Mirtchev

*Virginia A. Mulberger

*W. DeVier Pierson

*John J. Studzinski

TREASURER

*Brian C. McK. Henderson

SECRETARY

*Walter B. Slocombe

DIRECTORS

Stéphane Abrial

Odeh Aburdene

*Peter Ackerman

Timothy D. Adams

Bertrand-Marc Allen

*Michael Andersson

David D. Aufhauser

Matthew C. Bernstein

*Rafic A. Bizri

Dennis C. Blair

Thomas L. Blair

Philip M. Breedlove

Reuben E. Brigety II

Myron Brilliant

*Esther Brimmer

Reza Bundy

R. Nicholas Burns

Richard R. Burt

Michael Calvey

James E. Cartwright

John E. Chapoton

Ahmed Charai

Melanie Chen

Michael Chertoff

George Chopivsky

Wesley K. Clark

David W. Craig

Helima Croft

Ralph D. Crosby, Jr.

Nelson W. Cunningham

Ivo H. Daalder

*Ankit N. Desai

*Paula J. Dobriansky

Christopher J. Dodd

Thomas J. Egan, Jr.

*Stuart E. Eizenstat

Thomas R. Eldridge

Julie Finley

*Alan H. Fleischmann

Jendayi E. Frazer

Ronald M. Freeman

Courtney Geduldig

*Robert S. Gelbard

Gianni Di Giovanni

Thomas H. Glocer

Murathan Günal

John B. Goodman

*Sherri W. Goodman

Amir A. Handjani

Katie Harbath

John D. Harris, II

Frank Haun

Michael V. Hayden

Brian C. McK. Henderson

Annette Heuser

Amos Hochstein

Ed Holland

*Karl V. Hopkins

Robert D. Hormats

Mary L. Howell

Wolfgang F. Ischinger

Deborah Lee James

Reuben Jeffery, III

Joia M. Johnson

Stephen R. Kappes

*Maria Pica Karp

Andre Kelleners

Sean Kevelighan

Henry A. Kissinger

C. Jeffrey Knittel

Franklin D. Kramer

Laura Lane

Richard L. Lawson

*Jan M. Lodal

Douglas Lute

Jane Holl Lute

William J. Lynn

Wendy W. Makins

Zaza Mamulaishvili

Mian M. Mansha

Gerardo Mato

William E. Mayer

Timothy McBride

John M. McHugh

H.R. McMaster

Eric D.K. Melby

Franklin C. Miller

Judith A. Miller

Susan Molinari

Michael J. Morell

Richard Morningstar

Edward J. Newberry

Thomas R. Nides

Franco Nuschese

Joseph S. Nye

Hilda Ochoa-Brillembourg

Ahmet M. Oren

Sally A. Painter

*Ana I. Palacio

Carlos Pascual

Alan Pellegrini

David H. Petraeus

Thomas R. Pickering

Daniel B. Poneman

Dina H. Powell

Arnold L. Punaro

Robert Rangel

Thomas J. Ridge

Michael J. Rogers

Charles O. Rossotti

Robert O. Rowland

Harry Sachinis

Rajiv Shah

Stephen Shapiro

Wendy Sherman

Kris Singh

Christopher Smith

James G. Stavridis

Richard J.A. Steele

Paula Stern

Robert J. Stevens

Robert L. Stout, Jr.

*Ellen O. Tauscher

Nathan D. Tibbitts

Frances M. Townsend

Clyde C. Tuggle

Melanne Verveer

Charles F. Wald

Michael F. Walsh

Maciej Witucki

Neal S. Wolin

Guang Yang

Mary C. Yates

Dov S. Zakheim

HONORARY DIRECTORS

James A. Baker, III

Harold Brown

Frank C. Carlucci, III

Ashton B. Carter

Robert M. Gates

Michael G. Mullen

Leon E. Panetta

William J. Perry

Colin L. Powell

Condoleezza Rice

George P. Shultz

Horst Teltschik

John W. Warner

William H. Webster

*Executive Committee Members

List as of October 1, 2018



The Atlantic Council is a nonpartisan organization that promotes constructive US leadership and engagement in international affairs based on the central role of the Atlantic community in meeting today's global challenges.

© 2018 The Atlantic Council of the United States. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the Atlantic Council, except in the case of brief quotations in news articles, critical articles, or reviews. Please direct inquiries to:

Atlantic Council

1030 15th Street, NW, 12th Floor,
Washington, DC 20005

(202) 463-7226, www.AtlanticCouncil.org